

# Culture, Religion



## and Development



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## FOREWORD

PEOPLE who want to build up a just and fraternal world are growing in number and commitment. They know that good will and dedication do not suffice. They recognize more and more the following requirements for their lives :

- a deep understanding of the complex problems of development and social justice and of the functioning of the world in which they live ;
- a clear vision of the type of society they want to build;
- a realistic plan of action, with proper strategies and tactics; and
- a suitable training and experience which will enable them to feel and think with the masses and to become true animators, community organizers, and grass-root political workers. However controversial and difficult these questions might be, they cannot be avoided any more

The CSA (Centre for Social Action) was created in view of answering these urgent needs. Our aims are threefold :

—(i) **to make available relevant material on development and social justice.** In this respect, we will act as Editors of various booklets. Without necessarily agreeing with the detailed content of these publications, we will be responsible for the general orientation, thus seeing to the unity and coherence of the whole series.

—(ii) **to provide further encouragement, guidance and training to interested persons and groups.** We hope that our booklets will enable us to enter into deeper contact and collaborate with each other.

—(iii) **to help people rethink and reorientate their action to bring about social justice and true democratic socialism in India.** We shall take clear and firm stands on these issues whenever contemporary research makes it possible. We are also convinced—and we are sure our readers will share this view!—that mere words achieve very little. Our whole analysis is, therefore, action-oriented. Booklets nine to fifteen study possibilities of meaningful and realistic fields of involvement for social change in health care, law, development work, education, conscientization, mass organizations and politics.

These publications are not for experts or for people who are highly politicised. They provide non-technical, yet rather comprehensive introductions, for educated people who are still searching to deepen their reflection and action. Though sometimes dealing with relevant religious questions, these booklets are addressed to all, irrespective of creed and religion. Briefly, we want to help the general public to focus their attention on the main issues to be able to take a stand.

With the titles of the booklets on the back cover page, it is easy to grasp the plan of our study. In our series on "India's Search for Development and Social Justice", the first eight booklets analyse Indian Society. Such a study may appear somewhat theoretical and superfluous to some of our readers. We are, however, convinced that efficient action, even at the micro level, requires a scientific understanding of the society we live in. This is why we felt the need of insisting on this long-neglected topic. After describing the different development theories and the Indian situation in our two introductory booklets, we present our method of analysis in our third booklet. The following five booklets respectively deal with the recent historical background of India—the British Rule and the Independence Movement—, and the basic assumptions, policies and structural organisation of our country in the economic, social, political, and culturo-religious fields. The second part, entitled "Towards a New India", begins with a description of the society we want to build and some general reflections on problems of strategies and tactics. It further provides guidelines for action for people involved in various fields.

So far only four books are foreseen in the second series. We are sure that it will be necessary to extend this list in the near future. Our intention is to reflect on various subjects which are relevant to the issues of development and social justice. We have selected four such topics guided by the needs they fulfil for our readers.

The Editors

# Culture, Religion & Development

## Introduction

In the context of this series, problems of "development", specifically of Indian development, are broadly dealt with. While the first booklet gave a summary of the current development debate, the second one characterised the Indian situation. It became clear that the basic Indian problem is not "poverty" but exploitation and injustice. People do not suffer from lack of resources. They suffer from lack of power to use the available resources. "Development" therefore is by no means an economic problem only. Social justice, self-reliance and qualified economic growth can only be achieved if the 60% of people below the poverty line and the many others who live at a bare minimum, gain the power to assert their own rights. This is obviously a political task. It requires the total transformation of society. Such a transformation of society cannot be achieved from above by any government. It has to be achieved by the people themselves. From this point of view, people's organisation is an integral part of any viable development concept.<sup>1</sup> This statement can be easily verified by having a look at development plans and their implementation. Land distribution, guaranteed minimum wages and the like, have only been implemented, at least up to a point, where people have struggled for their rights. Kerala is an example to the point. Significantly, this is also the State in which the basic facilities of education and health care have been made most broadly available and where the birth rate has fallen not due to compulsion or any large scale FP drive, but due to the insights and decisions of the people themselves.

The task to achieve development through mass mobilisation and people's organisation meets of course with many difficulties. The entire process of planning is carried out "for" the masses, certainly not by the masses and if we look closely, we realise that it in fact neglects the interests of the majority of the population which lives just at or even below subsistence level.<sup>2</sup> Even those changes which are envisaged in the plans,

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1. C.T. Kurien in his book "Poverty and Development" (CISRS/CLS, 1974), makes the point that development process in India cannot become effective unless it becomes a mass movement; see e.g., *ibid.*, Ch. 4, "Strategy for Development".
2. See e.g., C.T. Kurien, "Analysis of the Fifth Plan", *ibid.*, pp. 90 ff., or E.M.S. Namboodiripad, "Indian Planning in Crisis", Chintha Publishers, Trivandrum, 1974.

soon get stuck in the mechanisms of bureaucracy. - The political parties are absorbed by vote hunting according to the rules of the parliamentary game and if it comes to the people themselves, it is quite commonplace to talk of the "pathetic apathy" or the "fatalism" of the Indian masses. The February 1977 elections have of course shown that the Indian masses are far from being apathetic and fatalistic. There is no nation in the world which has ever got rid of an emergency regime within so short a time by means of democratic mass mobilisation. Yet, whether the awakening in times of crisis can be sustained and transformed into a protracted struggle for the rights of the exploited classes in society remains to be seen. For a comprehensive understanding it is certainly necessary to analyse those non-economic factors which come in the way of development, namely "attitudes, institutions and the productivity consequences of very low levels of living".<sup>3</sup> Certainly an analysis of the bureaucracy,<sup>4</sup> the parties and political institutions, will throw an important light on the scope of mass mobilisation within the existing system and on possible alternatives to the system. The productivity consequences of a low level of living will have to be taken into account not only with respect to economic productivity but also with respect to the limitations which a low level of nutrition, health and education and a high degree of exploitation impose on the opportunities of people to organise themselves.

In the present booklet, we will however confine ourselves to the problem of attitudes as they are shaped in the broader framework of culture and religion and we will try to approach the question: How do culture and religion affect development, how do they accelerate and/or hamper the process of people's organisation?<sup>5</sup>

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3. Gunnar Myrdal, "The Challenge of World Poverty", Penguin International Edition, 1970, p. 29.
4. For an analysis of the undiminished and even stabilised influence of the bureaucracy on government policies under the Janata Government, see e.g., the article "Bureaucracy on Top" in EPW Special Number 1977, p. 1286 f.
5. In order to avoid misunderstandings, it may be useful to point out that we are dealing here with "people's organization" as a process. It is not possible within the scope of this booklet to spell out the precise type of people's organization, structure, goals, strategies, which will be needed in order to achieve the total transformation of society.

# 1. What is Culture?

## 1. Commonplace Assumptions About Culture

In order to understand what culture and religion do to people, how they affect their attitudes toward change, development, revolutionary transformation of society, we have to try to find some basic understanding of what culture and religion are. While most people would find it difficult to give a definition of culture, many have rather firm convictions about it. For official purposes it is common to refer to the "rich cultural heritage of our country". In such references, people have usually in mind art, music or literature, sometimes religion. The richness has to do with skills, refinement, erudition but also with variety in form, colour, rhythm, material. There is a tendency to equalise "cultured" and "educated". There is also a tendency to distinguish between "high" culture and "popular" culture. This way of referring to culture is quite universal.

There is another common sense way of referring to culture which is expressed in sentences like: "This is our culture, we are quite happy with it". This usually refers to certain customs or roles which people perform in society. This kind of sentence can often be heard when people try to explain the role of men and women in society, and the relationships between generations as well as between castes or other social groups. There is an awareness in people, that such customs and roles are different in different societies and also that they change within one society throughout history. But often the specificity of one's own tradition as well as the need of its preservation are advocated, apparently because they give a certain sense of belonging and fulfilment to people which they don't wish to lose. They often subordinate to this sense of belonging the question of right or wrong, good or evil. Whether a custom or a role oppresses people or hampers their development is either not asked or a rationalisation is found why the custom or the role are good all the same even though they may be a bit oppressive. The most striking examples for this understanding of "culture" can be found with respect to the family, male-female relationship, etc. In this case "culture" mainly refers to the regulation of social relationships. The other side of the coin is of course the rejection of the inherited social pattern.

A third common way of referring to culture can be found in the polemics against "Western culture" which is frequently connected with polemics against Western patterns of pro-

duction and consumption, e.g., "Coca Cola culture", but also implies a certain frame of mind which is supposed to be secular, matter-of-fact, industrialised and "efficient". Protest against "cultural dominance" also plays a role in polemics against multinational corporations. There are of course also people who idolise Western culture. In this third way of using the term culture, it becomes quite clear that culture is something more comprehensive than just art or religion, that it comprises not only the social relationships as well but that it is also intrinsically connected with the modes and relations of production, the development of the productive forces, and the distribution of labour as well as its fruits.

In these three examples it becomes clear that "culture" always has to do with cherished values. It is usually not something with respect to which people tend to be very detached. On the contrary, references to culture normally tend to be charged with emotions. This is important to note because it confronts us with the limitations of a rational analysis of culture as we are trying here when we ask what the mutual impact of culture and development is. There is a difficulty in understanding people's emotions and most cherished values by a rational theory. We will try later to understand more deeply the root causes of people's emotional attachment to culture or, on the other hand their disgust with culture, their rejection of it.

It is also obvious from these examples that culture is something which one inherits, which has a tradition, which is therefore largely influenced by the past. There is also the problem of "importing" culture together with certain technologies and productive processes. The imported culture again is shaped by a past but it is not my past, it is other people's past. In both cases, culture is something which one receives, one is exposed to, one is shaped by. If we think of "development", on the other hand, we think per definition of something future oriented which breaks away from traditions, something which is not "inherited", but planned and made and something which at least claims to be based on rational concepts. It is therefore quite natural to experience conflicts between "culture" and "development", between the "inheritance" and the future which is built, between emotional attachment and rational concepts. While development is usually thought of as a predominantly economic and political problem, it is evident that the society of the future will also have to have "culture". This leads us from the question of how culture is inherited and transmitted, to the question of how culture can also be created and invented. This question has been asked and partly answered in the "cultural revolutions" which accompanied the economic and political transformation of revolutionary China. If we analyse

this question more closely-how culture can be created and how this is part of the revolutionary process, we will also see that in fact any development concept has deep cultural implications since it always has to start from an inherited past and has to project very profound value-decisions when spelling out the goals of the future.

To sum up, it may be useful to try to develop a concept of culture which comprises and up to a point explains the different aspects so far mentioned.

## 2. Culture and Nature

Paulo Freire in his booklet *Cultural Action for Freedom* has defined culture as distinct from nature and as a result of people's capacity to *master nature*. This "mastering of nature" he sees basically expressed in two human capacities: the capacity to discover, use and invent tools which leads to the development of *technology* and the capacity to *develop language* and thus to call nature by name, to understand the environment, to systematise this understanding and thus even to conceive of more and more sophisticated transformation of nature and society.

Since Paulo Freire is an educationist, he mainly concentrates on the aspects of language and consciousness and of transforming society in an action-reflection process of "conscientization". For our own purpose of getting a more fundamental understanding of culture, it will be important however to expand a bit more on these two basic insights that man is able to create mechanical as well as intellectual tools for mastering nature. How does society come into the picture?

As long as people live on a subsistence level, in the sense of the whole group, e. g. a tribe, living at this level, their social organisation tends to be rather simple and egalitarian. They may be food gatherers or hunters. Since there is not much scope for surplus, there is not much scope for accumulation of wealth and therefore for inequality. But with the development of tools and techniques to improve food supply, a more complicated pattern emerges. For cattle breeders or agriculturists the question of private property of surplus, of tools, of land, of animals, etc., begins to play a decisive role: who appropriates and uses all this? With the diversification of production, social classes come into being and differences between those who work on land and those who don't. Artisans develop their skills and all kinds of specialisations emerge. With the creation of surplus also the opportunity

arises to have people work for the direct physical maintenance of the population (producing food), while others may produce other consumer goods (potters, metal workers, weavers, etc.), and again other groups supply to needs which go beyond immediate survival. Among these needs is e. g. the need for a certain minimum of security, i. e. also for solution of conflicts of interest. This leads to certain civil and finally political institutions on the one hand (forming patterns of leadership, of decision-making, etc.) and to the development of warfare on the other. The exchange of goods becomes a problem and leads to the development of markets and merchant classes.

Besides, the need for security also extends to such problems which are beyond the direct control of people at a certain stage of development of technology. The part of nature which is not technically mastered, is tried to be brought within the realm of comprehension or at least the efforts made to get into contact with nature, to appease it, to be in harmony with it, to harness it if not through technical means, then through manipulations of the mind. This leads to the development of magic which can also be characterised as a form of "pre-scientific science". The conflict between science and magic only emerges with the sharpening of rational understanding and the sophistication of techniques to control nature. This part of controlling nature leads to techniques in mental manipulation which require specialisation and give a certain power position to the specialists (e.g. shamans, magicians, people who can drive out spirits or command rain, etc.) who may exploit this position to their own advantage but on the other hand are catering to the people's need for security.

Apart from control over nature, general human problems can be identified which may be solved and viewed in a different light in different cultures but which can never be eliminated. These are the problems of birth and death, the question where we are from and where we go and why, the problems of human relationships of love and hatred, the problem of human suffering and the question whether the world and life has a meaning. These problems, which are given with the basic human capacity of developing language and comprehension, lead to the development of religion, philosophy and social theory. Again an elite of specialists like priests, gurus, teachers is formed which have a powerful control on the human mind. Usually, the theory of the meaning of life, comprises the individual, the group, the cosmos as a whole and also the explanation of certain forms of organisation of society. We must be careful not to understand "theory" as too rational a category. The interpretation of reality goes on on many different levels and the inherent human need to develop patterns of meaning expresses itself from the very

beginning at a very basic level, comprising not only the conscious mind and the intellect but also the unconscious.

The "unconscious" would comprise a certain level of "knowledge" which is not theoretical or conceptual. People "know" something without having explicitly been told or without even being able to express this knowledge at a conscious, theoretical level. Yet, this "knowledge" which is unconscious, may motivate their actions without themselves being fully aware of it. The rational reasons given for an action may be different from its unconscious motivations. This kind of knowledge is not identical with instinct in animals because it can express itself in symbols and images and it is also shaped by individual experiences as well as collective historical experience. The unconscious as such is part of human nature, but its content changes; in history, it is strongly shaped by early childhood experiences and it expresses itself in dreams, myths, works of art and human behaviour. While it is comparatively easy to change a person's consciousness at a rational level through reasonable arguing, it may be much more difficult to change certain attitudes which have been "internalised" at an unconscious level. Equality between men and women or abolition of untouchability are examples to the point. People may rationally understand that they have equal rights, but to "feel" equal and to be bold enough to really "behave" accordingly, may be much more difficult.

It is important to note that there may be considerable inconsistencies between the symbols of the unconscious and the rational perception of reality. Apart from this, symbols as such are normally ambiguous and can have contradictory meanings. At the village level, e.g., god is normally worshipped as female, the village goddess, and this female principle incorporates fertility and the creative and destructive forces of nature. The female principle is at the same time the active principle. In modern society, on the other hand, women, if reduced to the performance of fertility, e.g., childbearing, are neither powerful nor active since they are economically, socially and politically dependent. Consequently they are also supposed to be the "weaker sex". To treat women as "weaker sex" then, is an expression of their objective role in society which is dependent on men, but on the other hand there is also an unconscious attitudinal factor in treating women as inferior. We perceive different layers of the unconscious, corresponding to different situations in history: the biological performance of fertility as powerful on the one hand and the same factor reducing women to powerlessness on the other hand. The power aspect may be transformed in fear and the "weakness" aspect may be expressed in contempt. Roles in society can only be understood by analysing the

socio-economic and political content on the one hand but also underlying unconscious attitudes, symbols and values on the other.

It is an achievement of our century to have gained much deeper insights into the human mind at a theoretical level through the development of psychology. But the interaction of conscious and unconscious, of rational and irrational, of symbols and theories, has always been a stimulus of cultural self-expression of people. Since people do not only have language in the narrow sense of having words and thoughts but also have symbols, a sense of beauty, of form and rhythm, and have the need to communicate and to express meaning, there is also the scope for development of art, music, dance, drama etc., i.e. for "culture" in the more specialised sense of the word.

While these human self-expressions have to do with very broad problems relating to the meaning of human life, their concrete shape and structure is inseparably related to the structure of society, the mode and relations of production, the social, political and religious organisations which people give themselves. The perception of the world, in other words, has much to do with whether a person is rich or poor, powerful or powerless, dominating or dominated, a victim or a master of the circumstances which shape his or her life.

### 3. Culture and History

History has been defined as the "break with nature caused by the awakening of consciousness".<sup>1</sup> This refers to the conceptual side of culture: man as a being able to call nature by name to comprehend it and thus to transform it. Another way of defining history lays emphasis on the material development of culture by inventing tools and technology, developing production and devising organisational forms of division of labour and appropriation of the fruits of production. Writing history can then be defined as "the presentation, in chronological order, of successive developments in the means and relations of production".<sup>2</sup> An understanding which unites both these aspects, the level of consciousness as well as the relations of production, is expressed by Karl Marx at the beginning of the Communist Manifesto where he says: "All history is a history of class-struggles".

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1. E.H. Carr, "What is History", Penguin Books 1975, reprint, p. 134.

2. Kosambi, p. 1.

If we try to see history along these lines, we will perceive that it is made by *people*, not just by kings, emperors and field marshals. At the same time it becomes evident that those who keep history going, i.e. those who keep the production going, the toiling people, very often do not have the power to determine the course of events and to take important decisions. Those who appropriate the fruits of their labour, are normally the decision makers. In order to understand history it is therefore important to understand not only the relations of production but also the political, socio-cultural and religious institutions which structure the whole of society and make it function smoothly. It is necessary to understand the organisation of society as well as its underlying values, its beliefs, its ethos. For the Indian situation this means that an understanding of institutions like castes, sub-castes, guilds, village councils etc. will be important since it sheds light as well on the relations of production as on the corresponding ethos. This way of looking at history and from this background also understanding the present situation, means that we have to see economic, political, socio-cultural and religious developments all in one context and in constant interaction with each other. It also means to get away from the bureaucratic way of looking at history which India inherited from the British: the "administrator's histories" were focussing on changing dynasties and the life of rulers.<sup>3</sup> Instead, we will have to focus on the whole organisation of society and its institutions. To get away from dynasties will also mean to get away from a phasing of history according to the religion of these rulers. Traditionally, the Ancient period of Indian history was equated with Hinduism, while the Medieval period was considered to be Muslim and "Modernity" started with the arrival of the British. Such a periodization is misleading in its emphasis. As Romilla Thapar points out: "Religion was by no means the pre-eminent motivating factor of change in Indian history, as these titles would imply: it was one among a number of forces."<sup>4</sup>

Another stereotype from which we will have to get away is the idea that Indian society, based on the stability of its village communities, has been virtually unchanging for hundreds or even thousands of years. This myth was employed by the British administrators in a denigrating way and even Marx saw the "idiocy of village life" as the unchanging characteristic of Indian Society.<sup>5</sup> Gandhi, on the other hand, tried to form this myth into a praise, saying: "India remains

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3. For a criticism of this approach, see Thapar, pp. 17 ff.

4. Ibid., p. 21.

5. Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels, "On Colonialism", Foreign Language Publishing House, Moscow, p. 38.

immovable and that is her glory."<sup>6</sup> We owe much to historians like Kosambi and Kapur for having emphasized and thoroughly documented time and again the manifold historic changes in Indian society throughout the centuries.<sup>7</sup> Together with the myth of the basic stagnancy of Indian society goes also the myth of its "eternal culture" based on religion, "other-worldliness", "spirituality", "mysticism", going back to the Vedas and Upanishads and remaining virtually the same up to this very day. It will be important to see that religion and cultural values have always been changing, that they take their origin under specific historical, socio-economic and political conditions and that even if the values seem to remain the same, they may acquire different functions and meanings in the changing society. It is therefore necessary to look at ideas not on an abstract level but to ask how they operate in society: What does religion, what do values do to people in certain concrete situations?

When we try to look at Indian culture and religion with respect to its present day functioning in the development process, we are facing a twofold problem. We are facing the question of how cultural and religious values have emerged and changed historically in the course of the unfolding of the productive forces, but we also face the problem of the tremendous unevenness of the development process, e.g., we find the preservation of different layers of historical development at the same time, and often even side by side, at the same place.

Generally speaking, the development of the productive forces and relations of production in history goes through certain phases which have been described as primitive classless society (common ownership of the means of production and common distribution of the fruits of labour), slave society, feudalism, capitalism and socialism.<sup>8</sup> The danger of this categorisation is however that these phases have been considered as a necessary chronological sequence and as more or less applicable to all societies. It is therefore

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6. For example, in Hind Swaraj, "The Selected works of Mahatma Gandhi", Ahmedabad, 1968, p. 149.
7. One important factor is, e.g., the changing patterns in the control over land throughout history. A summary of this problem is given by Irfan Habib, "The Social Distribution of Landed Property in Pre-British India (A Historic Survey)", in "Indian Society: Historical Probing, In Memory of D.D. Kosambi", People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1974, pp. 264-316.
8. A popularising summary of this scheme can e.g., be found in Susobhan Sarkar, "A Marxian Glimpse of History", People's Publishing House, 1975.

important to note that such a scheme cannot be viewed as a "natural law", that there are wide variations in different countries and even within one country. It has also been debated whether this categorisation should be broadened 'to comprise a specific "Asiatic mode of production"'.<sup>9</sup>

While there is no scope for going into this historical dimension with respect to Indian society in the present booklet, it is important to be aware of the fact that the different phases of unfolding the productive forces are accompanied by their own culture in terms of organisation of society, language, values, religion, artistic self-expression, attitudes, etc. It is e.g. a commonplace observation that tribals who live as food-gatherers have certain values of sharing and of mutual aid, have values which are not shaped by the money economy and the laws of the market, have their own religion, art, music, dance and customs which are quite distinct from the culture of an agricultural village with different castes, private ownership in land, etc. It is also obvious that there are parts of the country-side in which the production is organised in a much more traditional way ("feudal" or "semi-feudal": i.e. by landlords who do not work on the land, have bonded labourers, employ traditional methods of agriculture, use surplus more for consumption and status symbols than for reinvestment), while in other parts we find capitalist farming (i.e. rich farmers who supervise modernised production with methods of green revolution, pay wage-labour and re-invest their surplus). Accordingly, it is possible to talk of "feudal values" or "Capitalist values" in describing the respective ethos and self-expressions of these different ways of doing agriculture. Similar differences can also be observed between urban and rural life-styles. Often, different kinds of values co-exist side by side. It is then more difficult to analyse what motivates people, why they cling to certain traditions etc. It is obvious that values change or persist in a changing society and it is important to understand why and how and when they do the one or the other.

#### 4. Culture and Religion

It is necessary to become a bit more specific on the question of how religion functions in society. While "culture" in the broader sense comprises all the material and intellectual as well as spiritual achievements of a society, religion tries to answer the question what life is all about. In traditional

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9. A critical review of the debate on the applicability of these categories to Indian society can be found in Bastiaan Wielenga's "Marxist Views on India in Historical Perspective", CISRS/CLS, 1976.

society religion formulated the core-values of society. We can broadly define religion as a system of beliefs, values, symbols and practices which give meaning to the individual, to groups, to society as a whole and to the cosmos,—all this with reference to some ultimate reality. Ultimate reality can mean one supreme being, or several gods; it can also mean some ultimate essence of all that exists as e.g. in early Buddhism or in the monism of advaita-philosophy.

It is important to note that this is only a descriptive definition which does not comprise any final theory about the origin of religion or any judgement about its claim to reveal truth. It also leaves open the question whether religion is by all means integral to human nature as many people claim or whether it will wither away when society is increasingly able to provide for all human needs and to answer all questions of meaning. The latter is maintained by the atheist brand of "scientific socialism".

While formerly religion had the function to explain many phenomena which could not be grasped by any rational or scientific means, this does not necessarily mean that science could or should substitute religion. If it does, it often acquires pseudo-religious functions and takes on a halo of indisputability which is in severe contrast to any questioning, experimental, open scientific attitude. It is also one thing e.g. to explain life in the categories of processes of body chemistry and death as a coming to end of these processes and another to reflect upon life and death in terms of faith. While scientific explanations of life and death may offer important insights, many people may find them too abstract, too boring, too irrelevant for their search for meaning and may insist on some poetic, mythological or theological expression. It is again important to keep in mind that people are rational and irrational, intellectual and emotional, conscious and unconscious at the same time and an important task is to integrate and reconcile these different aspects by becoming more aware of them.

Any scientific study of religion, as any scientific study on man for that matter, only covers certain limited aspects of the phenomenon, since each scientific discipline has to cope with the limitations of its own method. Thus, we can study religion as historians, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, theologians, philosophers or we can try, with simple common sense, to absorb as much as possible of the insights which these different disciplines offer. But as the study of medicine, psychology, history, sociology, anthropology etc. does not offer us a ready-made comprehensive answer to the question "what is man", we can also not expect any exhaustive answer to the question: "What is religion ?" On the contrary,

it can be observed that such explanatory answers as: "Religion is a projection of the psyche", "Religion is a projection of social conditions" are shortcuts which try to avoid the complexity of the problem.

However this does not mean that we have to capitulate in our effort to understand how religion operates in society. To find out which role religion plays in development, it is necessary to find out which functions it fulfils in society, or in other words, what it does, what it means to people. Whatever the content of a religious faith, it somehow affects the people who adhere to it and it shapes their conditions of life and is shaped by them. Romilla Thapar rightly points out: "If a religious movement finds a large following then its attraction must have some relevance to the kind of people who support it. A new language and a new literature can only emerge if they fulfil a need for the society in which they are rooted. It is not enough for the historian of India to present or to analyse the ideas of those who attempted to create the forms and contours of the history of India. It is essential to know why the people of India through the centuries have either accepted or rejected or modified these ideas."<sup>10</sup>

A striking example of this point is the proverbial "sacred cow" which according to a widespread bias is largely responsible for the backwardness and underdevelopment of rural India. The American anthropologist Marvin Harris, after studying a broad range of research on the functions of cattle in the agricultural set-up, has conclusively argued that the taboo on cow slaughter is economically quite functional and in fact protects the interests of the weaker sections of society.<sup>11</sup> He shows that the value of the cattle lies neither in giving milk, leave alone meat, but that its main function is to provide draught animals for ploughing and transport and fuel to keep the pots boiling. He also reasons that meat-eating is uneconomical since the production of animal protein requires an incomparably higher input than the production of plant-protein. He further shows that the number of cattle which is kept and the proportion of cows to oxen varies according to geographic conditions (depending e.g. on the availability of irrigation), that it is in other words not religion which primarily regulates the number of cattle kept or, if not slaughtered, being left to die. On the other hand he makes plausible that the cow taboo helps poor farmers in drought disaster to resist the temptation to slaughter his animal and thus to forego the danger of not being able to work on his land once the rains come back.

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10. p. 22.

11. pp. 14-30.

While, of course, a lot can be said in favour of animal-husbandry, dairies, restructuring of transport and the use of different cooking fuels, it is quite probable that such rational plans would, like Indian development plans in general, mainly benefit the already better off sections while a seemingly irrational taboo has a hidden rationality in protecting the weaker sections. The problem would be that these "rational" plans are based on value assumptions which are oriented towards the affluent: "useless" animals are slaughtered on a large scale. But in fact the "useless" animals are of eminent use to the poor man since he need hardly invest in them and yet they help to keep his life going. Thus, the taboo on cow slaughter has its own rationality for him. This rationality may not be consciously understood and of course we could think of more straightforward ways of protecting the interests of the weaker sections. This, however, will require a very comprehensive grasp of the functioning of society and a power-struggle. The example shows how seemingly irrational convictions can have an important function in the people's struggle for survival. It also shows that the functions of religion can be complicated, hidden and indirect and that it is necessary not to judge at face-value but to see and test the hidden implications.

In the CSA booklet on analysis of society it has been pointed out already that religion can have different functions in society, the main distinction having been made between the "prophetic-revolutionary" function which consists of protest against politico-economic injustice and the plea for a new society and the "submissive" function of religion which consists of legitimization and explanation of the status quo, otherworldly compensation for present suffering and exertion of social control by spelling out religious sanctions for a certain behaviour.

It is, however, extremely important not to apply these categories in any static or mechanistic way but to understand that most religions are highly ambiguous, that they convey both protest and submission, either in a historical sequence or even side by side at the same time. It is also important to see that it is not religion as such which conveys certain values and attitudes but that it is always *people* who convey such values and adhere to them. People are never people in the abstract but belong to certain classes, have certain positions in society which has much bearing on their religious self-expressions and convictions.

While we cannot go into the broader categories of the sociology of religion at any length<sup>12</sup>, it may be useful to briefly sketch some basic types of religious authority and forms of religious organisation which will be bent to foster certain specific attitudes in people. Of course these types are by no means exhaustive but only give examples of how to look at religious phenomena in order to understand them better. It must also be pointed out that these are more or less "Ideal-types", i.e., they are described here as a "pure" type which in real life will probably occur only in certain variations and mixtures. Four basic types of religious authority which occur in many religions, are the priest, the prophet, the saint and the mystic.

The priest is an important authority who by virtue of his priestly office, is supposed to be in some sort of perpetual institutionalised communion with god and as such functions as an intermediary between the people and god. While priesthood can be very inspired, charismatic, full of spirit in certain historical situations of religious creativity, it also serves to perpetuate and to institutionalise religion by the performance of rituals, the formulation of religious theories, and sometimes by the foundation of religious institutions; it therefore gives continuity and stability to religion. While the existence of priesthood is very important for safeguarding the continuity of religious tradition and often also for the transmission of knowledge and education, there are certain inbuilt mechanisms in the priestly profession which tend to make it a conservative, stabilising, therefore often oppressive and retarding force. The very privilege of being in communion with god gives the priest an opportunity to bestow on or withhold from people the benefits of this communion. The priest is therefore powerful. He can invest the powers that be with a halo of divine authority and throughout history this has frequently happened. Already the early Aryans invented the institution of divine kingship which gave the kings absolute authority while it gave the brahmins access to land and power. The European tradition had the "emperor of God's grace". Even nowadays, where the aspect of divine authority is wearing off through secularisation, the power to perform or withhold certain rituals which are important in the daily life of ordinary people, may lead to the exertion of considerable pressures.

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12. Detailed categorizations have been developed by "classic" sociologists of religion like Max Weber, "The Sociology of Religion", translated by E. Fischott, Social Science Paperbacks, London, 1966; and Joachim Wach, "Sociology of Religion", The University of Chicago Press, 1971 -- first published in 1944 in English.

Yet, since priesthood is in charge of transmitting and keeping religious tradition alive, it also comprises those traditions of religion, which may have a transforming and explosive force. The question is whether these are allowed to come into the open. Generally, an important function of religion is to give people a sense of identity, of belonging, of purpose and meaning. While this can be used to deviate people's minds from their daily sufferings and to make them to mutely accept these, it can on the other hand also lead to give people strength, to come into their own and to protest injustice. A decisive question will be how much priesthood is guided by its own self-interest or how much it is able to develop a genuine concern for people, especially the poor and oppressed. Usually, the formation and training of the priest stands in the way of developing such a genuine concern. The training and initiation of a priest is per definition elitist and alienating, whether it consists in the memorizing of sanskrit shlokas and ritual formulas or whether it comprises modern higher studies. All the same it is sometimes possible to break through this conditioning.

The prophet also derives his authority from communion with god but this communion is not institutionalised; it arises spontaneously, constitutes a strong charisma, and expresses itself not in ritual but in preaching and calls to action. While the priestly function is to safeguard continuity, the prophetic function is disruptive though it may also imply the use of ancient religious sources and claim a radicalisation and renewal of the same. Often, the prophetic critique is directed against the conservative traits of a priestly tradition and therefore also derives its own rationale from the existence of such a religious tradition. This is to say that prophets do not emerge out of a religious vacuum. While the priestly tradition tends to be elitist, the content of the prophetic message implies critique of unjust structures of society, protest against economic and religious exploitation and a massive call to change one's life. Though the prophet is taken aside by his personal charisma and may be very isolated or even persecuted, his urge is to extend his message to all people. He therefore has mass appeal and promotes egalitarian values.

Prophecy frequently has an important time dimension. It may call people to take decisive steps here and now because the time is ripe (the very emergence of a prophet indicates that the time is ripe), and it may project the promise of an ideal society like the Kingdom of God as the goal of history. While priesthood implies a time dimension in terms of continuity and tradition, its performance of ritual also introduces an element of eternal return. On the other hand, while prophecy is basically disruptive, it also reinterprets old traditions, marks the time as "ripe" for certain actions and sets a goal before people.

Since prophecy is spontaneous and charismatic, it has a limited span of life and cannot be reproduced at will. It is frequently followed up by some kind of priesthood. Prophets may provoke "movements" which may however die down with the slackening of prophetic charisma. While the "classical" type of prophecy can be seen in the Old Testament, the prophet as a type of religious authority also occurs in other semitic religions and in Islam and has in more recent times also appeared in religious movements in Africa and Asia. Stephen Fuchs has described the prophetic elements in Indian tribal religion and in Hindu Bhakti and other revivalist and reform-movements.<sup>13</sup> While the prophetic type of religious authority is close to a revolutionary transformation of society, it must be kept in mind that transformation of society cannot rely on spontaneity but needs a systematic approach of analysis and strategy. Besides, it is important to keep in mind that the history of religion also knows of "false prophets" who exploit their charisma to misguide the people. Facism e.g. can easily be accompanied by false prophecy. Even a revolutionary prophetic critique can misguide people into forms of totalitarianism. It is therefore important to have a critical understanding of any religious authority which expresses itself in political terms. At the same time, it is necessary to have a critical understanding of any religious or pseudo-religious claims of political leaders. Yet, certain prophetic figures with a religious appeal can trigger off people's movements which may take a political turn and radically transform society.

The other two types of religious authority are less distinct in their characteristics than those so far mentioned and they are normally less influential on the religious organisation and the formations of movements. The saint is also in possession of a personal religious charisma but he has a less active character than the prophet. His emphasis will be on moral requirements more than on change of society as a whole or he will see the latter as an automatic outcome of a fulfilment of the first. He will stress a very simple and unselfish life. The saint need not have any institutional religious attachment but he will also not focus as strongly on the criticism of religious institutions as the prophet does. It is therefore easier to reclaim the saint into the fold of institutionalised religion once he is dead. His distinction is not so much based on any achievement than on his personal nature and character. The saint gives guidance in question of worldly conduct but he will do it in a less spectacular manner than the prophet and he will normally not intend to arouse mass movements.

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13. "Rebellious Prophets. A Study of Messianic Movements in Indian Religions" Asia Publishing House, 1965.

The saint may provoke veneration beyond his death and often people will worship his relics in one form or another. Frequently, the saint is connected with suffering and martyrdom. This suffering is a more passive variety than the persecution to which the prophet may be subjected.

In India, we know of many saints in Islam as well as in Hinduism and it is a special feature that saintliness has a political appeal as can best be seen in personalities like Mahatma Gandhi or up to a point Vinoba Bhave or J.P. The problem is that their influence is based on personal charisma and their appeal is finally to a change of heart of the individual. Gandhi, of course, besides being a saintly figure was also a shrewd politician and skilfully knew how to merge these traits of his personality. He saw the need for decentralised people's organisation and was inventive in finding such forms of organisation. Yet, in these forms of people's organisation, class analysis was conspicuously absent. J.P. has, in a way, gone one step further, talking of total revolution and even class struggle. However, the criticism will concentrate on change of heart and the grasp of the functioning of economic and political systems may not be very sharp. While they address themselves to the masses, they also have a contempt for them since they appreciate human beings chiefly as individuals. Yet, the saintly appeal to change one's personal conduct and live a dedicated life has an element of truth which is important to any political movement. It also seems that the mass appeal of such leaders lies precisely in their saintly image, their simplicity, dedication and unselfishness which contrasts sharply with widespread corruption and obsession with power-politics and narrow self-interests. At the same time the constant moral appeals may also lead to a certain ethical overstrain and therefore have little chance of being heeded on a mass scale since rigorous new patterns of social control (as e.g., established in the Chinese revolution), are absent and everything is left to the individual.

The mystic, finally, is not a type of religious authority in the strict sense of the word since his life style can vary widely and there is also no set pattern of how he relates to his environment, to individuals, groups or the masses. The word mysticism is derived from the Greek word *mycin* which means to close one's senses to the outer world in order to encounter the godhead within. The goal may be mystical union up to the point of a merger with the divine as, e.g., in advaita philosophy. It is often maintained that mysticism leads to disinterest in worldly matters and is at the root of Hindu "otherworldliness". It is therefore important to point out that mysticism does not exclude worldly influence. In the Indian bhakti cults, mysticism has developed a mass appeal and the concept of mystical union with a loving god has raised the self-esteem of many

people and given them the strength to reject the social discrimination of the caste system. In such movements, low-caste members as well as women were of conspicuous influence which distinguishes them favourably not only from other religious movements, but even from many a contemporary political party which professes equality and emancipation as noble goals, and yet may be led by an elite which is high-caste and male.

As was said already, the described types will often not occur in a pure form but normally in variations and overlappings. Yet, an understanding of such basic types may help to assess concrete religious personalities. At the village level, one may often be confronted with types of religious authorities of a lesser order like mantrikas, sorcerers, exorcists, etc. Their influence will however, more or less automatically, get weakened in the course of social change and political organisation. Another source of influence may be *pauranikas* and other story tellers. Since such stories shape the minds and values of people, it is very important to be acquainted with them, to analyse their content and either to use and reinterpret them or to argue against them.

The same is true with respect to the pseudo-religious charisma of film-heroes which in a State like Tamilnadu is directly transferred into politics. It is completely inadequate to be upset about the gullibility of the people without understanding why the personality as well as the values projected, have such a fascination. Only systematic content analysis of movies can help to answer this question. It is, e.g., significant that in the MGR film *Nadodi Mannan* (The Migrant King) many necessary social improvements are envisaged but that they are not achieved by people's struggle but that they are generously bestowed upon the people by a leader who resembles very much the benevolent despot of the ancient Tamil kingdoms. The same is true for the more recent *Maduraiyai Meetta Sundarapandian* (The saviour of Madurai, Sundarapandian).

Another conspicuous feature of contemporary Tamil movies is the attitude of the hero towards women. While on the one hand the classical ideal of "Indian womanhood" is projected, the attitude of the hero is not correspondingly bossy, patriarchal and aloof but quite human and generous without however questioning the pattern of subordination in any way. This allows women to identify themselves with the traditional values in which they were brought up but at the same time not paying the normal price of being oppressed. Again, the wishful thinking projects benefits without bearing out conflict. While the values of humanism and liberation constitute an element of hope, the means by which they are achieved must be confronted with real life conditions.

It was already mentioned that the organisational pattern of a religion has a bearing on *how* it influences people. While, e.g., Western religions like Catholicism are highly structured and institutionalised, Hinduism has an extremely loose pattern of organisation. The highly structured form of religion gives the religious authorities—who again relate to each other in a strict hierarchy—a very strong hold and control over people by the way of indoctrination as well as through services (health, education etc.).

In Hinduism on the contrary, the hold on the people is completely decentralised. The great temples or mutts have attraction more to the middle class than to the masses. The same is true of Hindu reform movements. On the whole, Hinduism is much more individualistic than one might expect looking at the rigid social structure which it has produced. Salvation is something to be strived for and to be achieved individually. Worship, on the whole, is done by individuals, not by a collective which can be considered as "parish". The most important deity to a person, the *ishta-devata*, is a matter of choice. Priesthood is not an organised body, and clerical functions can also be performed by sadhus, swamis, gurus etc. While single sects like, e.g., the Lingayats in Karnataka or reform movements like the Arya Samaj may have taken to very efficient forms of organisation, this has only affected very limited sections of the people. Village religion has a rather autonomous pattern and is more regulated by social pressures of caste than by direct indoctrination through religious authorities. From this point of view, it is true to say that Hinduism is much more a way of life than a pattern of belief. This also means that a transformation of popular Hinduism will take place more on the level of involvement in life situations than at a doctrinal level.

It is important not to dismiss people's faith as "just superstitious" but to be aware of the real content of their faith and to find out what it does to them. It may often be wrong to have assumptions like: "People are fatalistic because they believe in karma". In reality, they may be fatalistic only because they do not see any constructive way of getting out of a desperate situation so that they seek comfort in a religious idea. Once they get politically organised and make experiences with their own power, their convictions may change in different ways: They may either cease to believe in karma or they may reinterpret the doctrine of karma in a completely different way. They can, e.g., argue that to believe in karma is an advantage because it means that any action has a result. Even if one does not achieve the result immediately, it is worth trying because the hope that deeds will bear fruits is valid not only for this life but even for the next. This kind of reinterpretation is a complete reversal of fatalism and is in no conflict

with an active involvement in the transformation of society. This example is not imaginary but taken from real life.

We finally have to take into consideration one of the control mechanisms of Hinduism which has up to a point even intruded into other religious communities—the laws about purity and pollution. This control mechanism, attached to the social hierarchy of caste, has religious connotations which are ingrained in people's minds by heavy social pressures and are rooted on an emotional level, acquired in early childhood. Feelings about "pure" and "impure" may survive on an emotional level and shape people's attitudes, even if on a conscious rational level an effort is made to overcome them. Thus, to break through these religious values will not only require reasonable arguing but also drastic action which affects people's emotions.



*We need to find out what religion does to people*

If we try to understand the social function of religion, we must be aware that religion, like any value system for that matter, has intended and not-intended effects. It has certain professed values, official ethics, expressed in theological terms, and it has operational values which people practically adhere to and which may be quite remote from the professed values. The rise of Buddhism, and Jainism, e.g., though professing the values of overcoming suffering through non-attachment and non-violence, brought in its wake the flourishing of trade and the rise of the merchant classes. Even in today's society, many Jains are in the money lending business. While the rise of the merchants is understandable since these religions protested against Brahminism and caste, were moderately

critical against Kshatriya militancy and avoided agriculture because of the unavoidable killing of small animals involved in it, it is at the same time obvious that the violence which is done to people in the money-economy, in extortion and accumulation of capital and especially in money lending, is equally remote from the professed value of over-coming suffering through non-attachment as the occupations of other castes. This is not to say that Buddhism and Jainism as religions produced the merchant class and a market economy, but, at a certain point in history, they furnished the value system which helped people to expand the economy into activities for which the society had materially matured, but which it could not accommodate and justify in the old religious framework. The same is true for the rise of capitalism in Europe going together with the Protestant Ethics especially of Calvinism as analysed by Max Weber.<sup>14</sup>

This is to say that even the "progressive" or "reactionary" effects of a religion cannot be determined at the level of the professed values only, but must be looked into at the operational level. Brahminism, e.g., has always promoted values which were elitist and hierarchical. Yet, during the time of the Aryan invasion, the very emergence of a Brahmin caste meant the creation of an overriding institution in society which helped to overcome the total fragmentation of society into different tribes which were fighting each other and each only treated their own kith and kin as "human". As such, it contributed to the formation of a larger society with expanded opportunities of social production.

The other way round, even "progressive" values can be quite reactionary at the operational level. Christians who talk of "Christ the liberator" and "good news to the poor" may mislead themselves and others about the true role of the church and believe that due to this "progressive" message they are automatically entitled to claim to be in the forefront of the liberation struggle. In fact, this may prevent them to face and analyse the real contradictions in society. The same values can also lead them to really take a committed stand in the struggle of the oppressed. The same is true for Hindus who believe that ultimately all human beings are equal because god or atman is present in all. This may lead them to be complacent about caste since they know that "ultimately" these social differences are irrelevant, or it may lead them to attack caste discrimination in order to try to overcome the system.

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14. "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism", translated by Talcot Parsons (Charles Scribner & Son, New York, 1958).

## 5. Culture, Religion and Ideology

While in traditional society, religion was formulating the core values of society, the value patterns in modern society have become more diversified under the impact of secularism and accelerated capitalist development. Religious values may still play a dominant role at the individual level, or for whole communities but, on the other hand, many attitudes and patterns of behaviour may lose their religious sanction and only be maintained out of social convention or may be discarded altogether under the impact of new economic relationships. Besides, general values of society like "democracy", "socialism", "modernisation", "development", "national integration", "secularism", etc., have neither religious sanction nor derive from social convention. They were projected during the freedom struggle and played a crucial role in building up the modern Indian state. This pluralism of value patterns within a society has been termed "disharmonic system"<sup>15</sup>: the social reality and the prevailing ideology are not congruent, as opposed to traditional society which was a basically "harmonic system" because the leading values were basically congruent with the social reality. Of course, there was a certain amount of "disharmony" also in the traditional society since there was always economic and social change while older values still persisted or, on the other hand, new values were projected in protest against outdated social conventions. Yet, under modern conditions the incongruence is much stronger because technological and economic as well as social changes occur at an accelerated pace and secular values are in an open competition with religious values, "Western" values with "indigenous" values.

At the same time, the task to relate to one's history, to maintain a continuity, to define one's national identity in dialogue with tradition, makes some kind of appraisal of religious and cultural values on the part of secular ideologies necessary. In traditional society, the ideology which gave authority to the state and enforced the social structure, was directly derived from religion, i.e., it claimed to be of ultimate value and was ritually secured by the priesthood.<sup>16</sup> This is, e.g., true for the concept of sacred kingship which prevailed in India in ancient times. Generally, the task of the Hindu ruler was to promote dharma and patronize religion. The influence of Brahmins in the royal courts was very strong. While ritually the Brahmins were highest in their caste status,

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15. See "Methods of Societal Analysis", pp. 27 ff.

16. For a historical survey on the problem of secularism and an evaluation of the concept of the secular state, see Donald Eugene Smith, "India as a Secular State", Princeton University Press, 1963.

they never openly contested the worldly powers of the kings but knew to use these for their own benefits. Social laws were strictly fixed according to the caste system. Even more secular political concepts as, e.g., expounded in Kautilya's Arthashastra, did not disrupt the close relationship between religion and government. Yet, usually government did not seek to impose any particular creed on the subjects and not only a variety of sects was tolerated but even the propagation of Buddhism, Jainism and later Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Islam.

While in Islam originally the basic idea is one of identity of religious and political community, Muslim rule in India was without a historical link to the caliphate for most of the time and religious policies were depending on the relationship between the ulama and the sultanate. While there was an epoch of pluralistic tolerance under Akbar, Aurangzeb persecuted Hindus with great fanaticism. The British, in accordance with their policies of commercial exploitation, after some wavering pursued a policy of religious non-interference but later knew how to use and foment tensions between the Hindu and Islamic communities to their own advantage.

Though religious overtones were present in the mutiny of 1857 and in the Hindu renaissance under leaders like Swami Dayananda and Swami Vivekananda, who tried to assert the superiority of Hindu religion and culture over the Christian West, the foundation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 was guided by secular values and emphasized the irrelevance of communal background for membership, though in fact a certain amount of Hindu influence was prevalent in the organisation.

Yet, by the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th Century the struggle between "Moderates" and "Extremists" for control over the Congress broke open the problem of religion and ideology in the liberation struggle.<sup>17</sup> The situation was complicated by the fact that the moderates, represented by leaders like M.G. Ranade and G.K. Gokhale, pursued a secular line but were at the same time extremely reluctant to assert the Indian national rights against the British. On the other hand, the extremists like Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Aurobindo Ghose, combined militant nationalism with Hindu cultural revivalism. The glorification of India as the mother goddess and the propagation of Ganesh Chathurti and the Shivaji

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17. This problem is dealt with by Sankar Ghose, "Political Ideas and Movements in India", Allied Publishers, 1975. The value assumptions and cultural implications underlying the different ideologies in India are analysed in detail by M.M. Thomas, "The Secular Ideologies of India and the Secular Meaning of Christ", CISRS/CLS, 1976.

festival in Maharashtra captured the imagination of the masses. Political reinterpretations of the Bhagavad Gita played an important role. While the class base of the moderates was upper middle class, they advocated social reforms like abolition of child marriage, sati, etc. They subscribed to British values in the hope to acquire a more influential position within the system. The extremists, on the other hand, had a middle to upper middle class base and had no illusory expectations towards the generosity of the British. At the same time, their caste and class background, combined with cultural self-assertion, made them socially conservative, though they tried to appeal to the masses, using their own language and imagery. The terrorist wing of the nationalist movement used religion in a similar way. The battle against the Britishers was seen in the categories of the mothergoddess slaying the demons. But it was only Gandhi, who succeeded to transform the Congress into a mass organisation, expressing the goal of independence in terms which made sense to the oppressed and the illiterate. Being clear in his political objectives, Gandhi developed a line of cultural self-assertion which was however at the same time quite self-critical and aiming at social transformation, including campaigns against child-marriage, dowry and untouchability. To Gandhi, the nationalist movement definitely had a religious dimension and he saw his own position in terms of religious leadership, saying: "Most religious men I have met are politicians in disguise. I, however, who wear the guise of a politician in disguise, am at heart a religious man," and: "Those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means".<sup>18</sup> Gandhi clearly saw that something like a cultural revolution had to be an integral part of the struggle for independence. Since his economic ideas had their own limitations: avoidance of strict class analysis, "trusteeship" instead of abolition of private ownership in means of production, acknowledging the varna-system for the sake of "bread labour",—the socio-cultural transformation he aimed at did not go far enough and he was criticised for this by people like Ambedkar. Yet, his effort to integrate political and socio-cultural transformation deserves attention because it was rather exceptional and had wide mass appeal.

The leftist forces in India like the socialists, the "new humanists" under the leadership of M.N. Roy, or the communists, were much more oriented towards Western values and therefore lacked the mass appeal which would have required a strong cultural aspect in their methods of mobilisation. Often the leadership even in the leftist parties remains Brahmin and thus reproduces willy-nilly the social hierarchy of the caste system.

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18. Quoted after Sanker Ghose, op. cit., p. 77.

On the other hand, explicit movements for cultural renewal like the Anti-Brahmin Movements in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, neither led into the mainstream of the nationalist movements,—which they felt was more caste-dominated than the British Raj—nor did they evolve a clear socio-economic analysis or strategy.

We can however conclude from the experiences of the independence struggle as well as from those of the Marxists and the regional parties (like, e.g., D.M.K./A-DMK, Akali Dal etc.) that creative cultural transformation is an essential part of mass mobilisation and mass organisation. While of course political ideology has to be secular if it wants to avoid obscurantism, it needs a cultural theory which allows to take the cultural and religious heritage and traditional values of the people seriously and helps to transform them in the political struggle. This need arises because people do not live on bread alone and because they need a sense of identity, of belonging and of continuity even in a revolutionary struggle. Much of course depends how cultural values are chosen and propagated. Since this is a matter of feelings and emotions also, chauvinism, casteism or even racism can easily creep in. Gail Omvedt has pointed out some reasonable criteria for the definition of "national culture" or culture in any Indian state: "If the emphasis is towards sanskritic Hinduism, Vedic culture, Vedanta philosophy, Mahabharata and Ramayana stories, this implies a bias that is *socially* in favour of the upper castes and towards indirect support of the caste system, and *geographically* in favour of North India. If the emphasis is towards non-Vedic culture, towards peasant traditions and tribal traditions, towards traditions of religious revolt, running through Buddhism and the Bhakti cults, the bias is socially in favour of the 'masses' and geographically in favour of the outlying linguistic regions of India. In scholarship and national thinking the bias up to now has been towards a sanskritic and, therefore elite, basis of Indian culture, but in fact non-Sanskritic traditions claim as much to an all-India spread."<sup>19</sup> At present, the revolutionary transformation of cultural values takes place at the grass-roots level in the struggle against oppression.<sup>20</sup> This process is however not yet sufficiently reflected in the theories and strategies of the leftist forces who try to build up mass organisations.

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19. In EPW, vol VI, No. 37, 1974, "Jotirao Phule and the Ideology of Social Revolution in India".

20. See, e.g., Maria Mies, "Peasant Movement in Shahada", Journal of Contemporary Asia, vol 6, No. 2, 1976, pp. 172 ff.

## 2. The Ambiguity of Cultural Factors in Development\*

If one asks people to list the reasons for poverty in India, then things like "the weather", "laziness and superstition" are mentioned more frequently than, e.g., "exploitation". If we ask why this is so, we can assume that it is partly because lack of rains or too much of it, or the apathy of people are more visible than a complex relationship which is exploitation. In reality, of course, the question why only one fourth of the irrigational resources in the country are used or why people do not feel like taking initiatives but like to perform rituals, is equally complex. But it seems to be easier to fall back on such reasons like the weather or laziness and superstition, since they seem to be "natural" factors about which little can be done—their social roots and implications are hidden. "Exploitation", on the other hand, describes a socio-economic relationship which cannot so easily be seen as a "natural" phenomenon, though often it seems to be accepted as such.

While the socio-economic root causes of poverty have to be analysed, the attitudes of people shaped under specific living conditions must also be properly understood. There is no doubt that cultural factors like language, caste, family-structure, village structure and religion, play a significant role in development, especially if we look at development under the aspect of people's organisation and mass mobilisation. But it is important to analyse how such factors function because they operate in a network of variables of socio-economic and political conditions and they can be a hindrance in the development process as well as an accelerator.

### 1. Language

There is no doubt that language is a vital means of self-expression of people and that most people can express themselves best in their own mother tongue. It is therefore evident that people's organisation can only go on in the vernacular. This, however, also requires that the vernacular is fully acknowledged and used as a language in the courts since the struggle for their rights frequently puts people behind bars. While it is not much of a problem to analyse and express a

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\* This Chapter is an abridged and strongly revised version of the second chapter of my book "Religion and People's Organisation in East Thanjavur" (CISRS/ CLS, 1977).

local conflict in the vernacular, problems immediately arise when it comes to political issues of overriding concern. As soon as a certain level of abstraction is required, the local language does not lend itself so easily. If it comes to theoretical texts of say, Marxist content, the translation into the vernacular is often so artificial that it constitutes nothing less of a foreign language than the English version. This is certainly true with respect to Tamil translations of Marxist classics. The position is better in States like Bengal and Kerala where Marxists have organised people at the village level on a large scale, since several decades. Apparently, what is required is not only qualified translations but really a rewriting and rethinking of political analysis in the categories of the indigenous languages which is a very difficult creative process. While self-expression and analysis in the vernacular is badly needed, it, at the same time, makes interstate communication more difficult and tends to confine movements along language borders. Multilingual communication at least within and among the Southern and Northern States respectively is therefore essential, while it is even more difficult to bridge the gulf between North and South. While English as a link-language has the advantage of giving people access to a sophisticated socio-economic and political analysis, it also creates social discrimination and makes access to higher education a power factor even in movements which are supposed to overcome discrimination and oppression.

Another problem consists in the fact that language is a mirror of existing social relationships and that especially old and tradition-bound languages communicate many discriminations and value judgements which are imbibed from early childhood and frequently remain at an unconscious level. One of the most widespread examples is the discrimination against women expressed in the vernacular languages. While it is customary that women address their husbands in the respectful "honorific" form, the husbands will use the so-called intimate address which they would also use for children servants or any other people of obviously lower social status. Likewise, there are innumerable terms which convey subtle value judgements. Frequently the words which mean to translate a term like "social system", has a value- connotation which implies a meaning like "the good old order",—which makes a critical use of the term very difficult. In other cases negative connotations come in the way. A "vision of the future" may have the underlying meaning of "an unrealistic speculation based on vain dreams" so that it becomes very difficult to use the term in a constructive sense.

That language as a cultural factor is basically ambiguous can be seen in many language-agitations before and after

independence. While the Congress party was rather undecided on the language issue, the Communist party supported the right of various "nationalities" of India based on language, culture and tradition to form separate states from the early forties. For the same reason, the Communists supported also the Muslim cause for a separate nation. The right to be recognised as a distinct nationality based on language and culture even implied the right to secession. This stand was based on the nationality-policies as they had been developed by Lenin in the Soviet Union. This line is nowadays preserved in the CPI-M though it is not very explicitly voiced.<sup>1</sup>

In terms of class, language agitations expressed mainly the self-assertion of the middle classes. In this sense it went together with anti-imperialism and protest against semi-feudal caste-and class domination and has a limited emancipatory function. In the words of Karat Prakash: "In the various linguistic regions of India, socio-economic changes resulted in intense inter-caste politicking indicating class conflicts and then found shape in a strong linguistic-nationality identity. This stage in the development of nationalities was a historical process associated with the development of capitalism and the break down of the pre-capitalist system in the rural areas."<sup>2</sup>

The Indian big bourgeoisie, though on the one hand interested in the language issue as a matter of emancipation from the British, also needed English as a dominating medium and besides this, felt that the mass agitations on language were a ferment which drew large numbers especially of urban middle classes into politics and thus advanced the democratic revolution which was shaking their position of dominance. The regional bourgeoisie was trying to use the language agitations to its own advantage. In the country-side, rich peasants asserted themselves.

To sum up once again in the words of Karat Prakash: "A pattern can be discerned. Linguistic nationalism has played the role of a midwife in the transition from semi-feudal awakening to modern socio-economic (bourgeois-capitalist) awareness. In this sense it was a necessary step towards the bourgeois-democratic phase which is still only a partial phenomenon. The linguistic nationality movements were a phase in politics which was necessary and constructive. It consolidated regional social classes and gave politics a distinct class

1. For an analysis of the problem see Prakash.

2. Ibid., p. 15.

character along with a workable framework below the all-India level."<sup>3</sup> While the language agitations were not progressive *per se* they had certain democratizing effects.

The formation of new language states after independence responded to a genuine need. In certain parts of the country, e.g., in Andhra and Kerala, communists succeeded to use the language issue to consolidate their base. At the same time it can be seen that many parties who have entered in language controversies like the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti, the Mahagujarat Parishad, the Jharkhand Party, the Shiromani Akali Dal and the DMK are often not free from petty chauvinism. Sometimes the language issue can be used to divide the working class as, e.g., in Maharashtrian agitations against Kannadigas and other South-Indians. In Tamil Nadu, the fight for Tamil and against Hindi had genuine emancipatory implications, since it was part of the anti-Brahmin movement which succeeded to significantly cut down Brahmin dominance in the State. The struggle was accompanied by a general cultural renaissance which definitely helped Tamilians to develop a sense of identity, self-esteem and solidarity. At the same time, to revel in the glorious past often produces megalomaniac overtones which deviate people's attention from the solution of contemporary socio-economic problems by means of class-struggle.

## 2. Caste

It has often been maintained that caste is the one cultural factor which keeps Indian society basically static and stagnant. Besides, people often point to the fact that caste has been "abolished" constitutionally and the evils of caste which are seen as the remnants of an old social system are described in such a way that it is very difficult to understand how caste could have possibly survived to the extent it did, in present day Indian society, or why even those people who are at the bottom of the caste hierarchy often stick to the system and insist on treating others as "inferior" while they refuse to question the "superiority" of those who are considered as "higher".

Caste as a social institution comprises a very complex plurality of factors which are activated in their relevance in different situations to different degrees. This accounts for the tremendous flexibility and adjustability of the caste-system. It does not only give a sense of belonging and loyalty to people but it also furnishes a very comprehensive set of explanation to people as to why society is as it is, including aspects of

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3. Ibid., pp. 46f.

history, race, division of labour, customs, attitudes and rituals. Besides, caste has also been used as a vehicle of upward mobility, ritually, socially, economically and politically. In order to understand how caste operates in people's organisation, it is important to get a glimpse of the complexity of its different components.

Louis Dumont, who has given a very penetrating analysis of the caste system<sup>4</sup> defines caste as a hereditary group, distinguished from others by "*separation* in matters of marriage and *contact*, whether direct or indirect (food); *division of labour*, each group having, in theory or by tradition, a profession from which their members can depart only by certain limits; and finally *hierarchy*, which ranks the groups as relatively superior and inferior to each other."<sup>5</sup> Hierarchy and discrimination are maintained by the distinction between pure and impure which applies to ritual status, life styles and also occupations. The system is characterized by the antipodes of the Brahmins at the top of the hierarchy and the untouchables at the bottom.

As distinct from this hierarchy of pure and impure, Dumont describes another hierarchy, the one of the four varnas which is graded according to a different sort of status criteria leaving out the untouchables. While even here the highest status is maintained by the brahmin, a concession to the religious authority, the rest of this hierarchy is defined by criteria of secular power, the kshatriya, though ritually less "pure," due to his profession, being above the vaishya and shudra. While conceding the highest status to the religious authority, there is also a balance between status and power: the brahmin giving religious sanction to the worldly power (e.g., in the ancient institution of sacred kingship, or at the village level, the performance of brahmin ritual to bless the existing order) and the worldly power (i.e., the ruler) giving power (e.g., land, money, protection) to the brahmin.

The dialectics of ritual status (pure/impure) and power, both factors being separated from each other, and yet up to a point related, account for the tremendous flexibility and adjustability of the caste system.

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4. "Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its implications" Transl. by Mark Sainsbury (Vikas Publications, 1970) Dumont's analysis is largely based on earlier "Essays on the Caste System" by Celestin Bougle (Published in French 1908, English by D. F. Pocock, Cambridge University Press, 1971).

5. Durmont, op. cit., p. 21.

In actual life, of course, the unit of distinction is the sub-caste (jati) which Dumont only deals with in terms of "segmentation", i.e., his definition of caste is more concerned with the basic principles of the system as such and not so much with its concrete appearance in daily life. If we think in terms of jati, there are many different criteria for caste-distinction as summed up by G.S. Ghurye: "First, territorial or jurisdictional separateness; second, mixed origin; third, occupational distinction; fourth, some peculiarity in the technique of one and the same occupation; fifth, sectarian difference; sixth, dissimilarity of customs; and last, adventitious circumstances, suggesting certain nicknames."<sup>6</sup>

It is important to keep in mind that throughout Indian history the caste-system has gone through an extremely long and differentiated development, acquiring different functions in different economic situations and acquiring varying degrees of religious sanction and ritual rigidity. It is generally assumed that the distinctive features which resulted in the emergence of caste lay in occupation as well as in race. The Aryans, when they first migrated into India were composed of three social classes:<sup>7</sup> the warriors or aristocracy, the priests and the common people. Professions were not hereditary and there were no limitations on inter-dining and inter-marriage between these classes. When the Aryans subjected the Dasas, as the original population was called, aspects of race and of religion were introduced into the system.<sup>8</sup> The Dasas became shudras, the fourth caste, subordinate to the "twice-born" Aryan castes of the kshatriyas (warriors), brahmins (priests), and vaishyas (landowners and traders), and were required to clear forest-lands and to perform the strenuous tasks of cultivation. With the introduction of sacred kingship, the brahmins rose to the top position in the hierarchy since they bestowed divinity upon the King.

That aspects of race also played a part is evident from the fact that class was transformed into caste with the subjugation of the Dasas who were of a different stock and can also be recognised in the original meaning of varna which is "colour". While it is not possible to identify clear racial

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6. "Caste and Race in India", 5th ed. Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1969, p. 34.

7. Class, as distinct from caste, is entirely defined by economic power while caste implies also non-economic criteria of status. Due to the occupational affiliations of caste, there is much overlapping between both but religious and ritual taboos may stand in the way of developing class-consciousness.

8. Cf. Romilla Thapar, "A History of India" pp. 38 ff.

distinctions between castes nowadays, a vague feeling about the racial characteristics of "high" and "low" castes is definitely prevailing, connecting "fair skin" and "refined features" with "high" and "dark skin" and "crude features" with low. Andre Beteille has frequently pointed out that these "racial" characteristics as well as the ritual connotations of "pure" and "impure" have a lot to do with life-styles, occupation (e.g., manual labour under very hard conditions, clean and unclean work, etc.) and access to education.<sup>9</sup> All the same, these value judgements about race and purity and pollution are emotionally charged and change only slowly in a society where socio-economic and political upward mobility have become more accessible. With the development of agriculture and the stabilisation of a rather self-sufficient village-economy, the caste system got very much consolidated, operating according to the rules of the jajmani system, i.e., the bartering of services.<sup>10</sup> While the system was extremely unjust according to modern standards, since it was based on hierarchy and therefore anti-egalitarian, it provided for a high degree of social security. It was also highly flexible by allowing for professional and religious differentiation, absorbing new tribes and being in a permanent flux of fission and fusion between different groups. The tenacity of the system was proven when it managed to outlive the social protest expressed in movements like Buddhism and Jainism and to reabsorb reform-movements, e.g., Veerashaivism in Karnataka, into the caste-fold.

With the development of market and money-economy, new factors of economic mobility developed, which disrupted the barter system, and with the advent of the British Raj, political values and administrative practices were introduced, which accounted for numerous shifts and changes in the caste hierarchy. Besides, the spreading of technology and education provide for new occupational opportunities and new criteria of status.

From the 19th century on, caste has been used very consciously as a means of social upgrading and economic advance, as also political power. The fact that the British censuses provided for recorded ranking in the caste hierarchy, led many castes to try to improve their status by being admitted in a "higher" category. It was particularly widespread to claim kshatriya-origin since this did not require too many ritual concessions but at the same time safeguarded high status.

9. See, for example, "Castes : Old and New."

10. Dumont points out (p. 97) that "jajman" originally meant: "He who has religious rites performed by brahmins by giving them fees."

Another means of improving one's status was the imitation of sanskritic brahmin ritual, sanskritization, going together with vegetarianism, ban on widow remarriage and general subordination of women.<sup>11</sup> Since the Brahmins traditionally had the monopoly on education, and many under the British Raj switched to higher English medium education, "Westernisation" can be a follow-up of Sanskritization, as has been pointed out by M. N. Srinivas. While both means to climb up the social ladder are elitist, they are at the same time in tension with each other: "Sanskritic" values reinforcing conservatism, while Western education can also open up perspectives of egalitarianism and critical analysis of society.

While caste-upgrading and sanskritization basically acknowledge the validity of the caste hierarchy and only try to give a better place within the same to a specific group, there have time and again been movements which fundamentally try to question the caste hierarchy as such. Historically, this was done by Buddhism, Jainism and reform-movements like Veerashaivism and many bhakti-sects though in these cases the criticism against the caste system was more a by-product of a general religious renewal. In modern times, we have to think especially of the Anti-Brahmin Movements in Maharashtra<sup>12</sup> and Tamil Nadu<sup>13</sup> which involved genuine mass protest against Brahmin domination. Mahatma Phule, e.g., reacted against the Aryan bias in the neo-Hinduism of the opposing Mahatristian Brahmin nationalists Tilak and Ranade, and mobilised popular village culture as opposed to the high caste symbols of Ganapathi and ruler Shivaji. Similar cultural contents were brought forward in Tamil Nadu, where the Dravidian re-interpretation of the Ramayana in favour of the demon-king Ravana reversed the Aryan tradition. In their protest against Brahmin landlords and against Brahmin domination in fields like education, administration and politics, these movements helped broad sections of the middle and lower middle classes

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11. See for example, M. N. Srinivas, "Caste in Modern India", Asia Publishing House, 1962, pp. 15-9.
12. See for example, Dhananjay Keer, "Mahatma Jotirao Phule: Father of Our Social Revolution", Popular Prakashan, 1964; and Gail Omvedt, "Cultural Revolution in Colonial Society: The Non-Brahmin Movement in Western India 1873-1930", Scientific Socialist Education Trust, Bombay, 1976.
13. See for example, R. L. Hardgrave, "The Dravidian Movement", Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1968; idem, "Religion, Politics and the DMK", in D. E. Smith, "South Asian Politics and Religion", Princeton, 1969, pp. 213-234; and E. F. Irschick, "Politics and Social Conflict in South India: the Non-Brahmin Movement and Tamil Separatism 1916-1927", Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1969.

to assert themselves and to improve their socio-economic and political conditions. Since these movements took the cultural transformation very seriously, they sometimes achieved more popular participation than leftist parties who were focussing on class-struggle, but neglecting the cultural dimension, remained Brahmin-dominated and elitist in their style of leadership. M.M. Thomas has recently raised the question whether owing to the rigidity of the Indian cultural heritage, cultural revolution has to be a priority before any socio-economic revolution can succeed.<sup>14</sup> It is however obvious, or that the potential for social transformation in the Dravidian Movement was limited. One of the objectives was to substitute the influence of Northern industrialists by Tamilian industrialists.

The anti-brahmin movements generally did not make a sustained effort to improve the lot of the untouchables. It was therefore necessary to create a special movement for this particular purpose which is known as the Neo-Buddhist movement under the leadership of Dr. Ambedkar<sup>15</sup>. While the objective of the Neo-Buddhist movement was to improve the lot of all untouchables, it was most successful in Maharashtra and only in a few other States like Karnataka. It also did not succeed to break up caste barriers among the untouchables themselves since it remained largely confined to Ambedkar's own community, the Mahars, and was not able to include the neighbouring untouchable castes like Chambhars and Mangs. The same is true for the constituency of the Republican Party which also remained confined to Madras and later split into factions. Yet, the political gains which were made by founding bodies like the Depressed Classes Association are considerable.

The provisions which are made in the Indian constitution for giving opportunities to scheduled castes and backward classes are unthinkable without the pioneering struggles of people like Ambedkar, though converts to Buddhism and Christianity are excluded from these special provisions, since they left the Hindu fold and are therefore no longer considered as socially handicapped. At the same time these special provisions are basically ambiguous. While they give opportunity to genuinely disadvantaged sections, they again perpetuate a vested interest in caste, and in being acknowledged as "backward",—one of the better known examples being the Lingayats in Karnataka who, while being quite a powerful

14. M. M. Thomas, "The Secular Ideologies of India and the Secular Meaning of Christ", CISRS, Bangalore, 1976.

15. See T. S. Wilkinson and M. M. Thomas, "Ambedkar and the Neo-Buddhist Movement", CISRS/CLS, 1972.

community fought a successful battle for not losing their "backwardness".<sup>16</sup>

Similar experiences have been made with other caste groups who tried to question the caste-system as a whole. The Izhavas, a caste of toddy-tappers, in Kerala, got organized in the Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana (S.N.D.P.) Movement which brought them access to education, socio-economic improvement and vast political influence. While the movement remained confined to this one community and did not succeed in its avowed objective to question the caste system as a whole, there is no doubt that the educational impact of the SNDP and the exposure of many Izhavas to the communist ideology in the course of their politicization, contributed not only to the emancipation of the community, but also gave their organisation as a caste, a dimension of class struggle.

The same is true for the struggle of the Dalit Panthers in Bombay in recent years which developed in protest against corruption within the Republican Party. Though the movement has remained urban based and again confined to the Mahar community, it is a new feature that they identify themselves in class terms, trying to speak for all oppressed sections: scheduled castes and tribes, Neo-Budhists, workers, landless labourers, small farmers and nomadic tribes. They address as 'friends' all those who wish to destroy the caste system and all really leftist parties. They mark as 'enemies': power, prestige, wealth, landlords, capitalists, the government, money-lenders and communalists.<sup>17</sup>

It can be observed as a recent development, that increasingly caste-struggles attain class-character by taking up class issues. This is, e.g., true in the struggles of Harijan landless labourers against high caste landlords. Jaya Prakash Narayan, though in general very nebulous about his "total revolution" expressed this state of affairs when he recently talked of "organising class struggle among Harijans". While caste-feelings can still come in the way of broader class-solidarity, the immediate and strong emotional experience of caste-discrimination can also embolden people in the class struggle and sometimes it is the caste discrimination which makes

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16. See for example, D. E. Smith, "India as a Secular State", Chapter 11, "Caste and the Secular State"; and Beteile's essays, "The Harijans of India" and "The Future of the Backward Classes", in "Castes: Old and New".

17. See "The Dalit Panthers and their Manifesto", Religion and Society, vol XXII, No. 2, pp. 24 ff.

them search for political alliances which finally broaden their horizon

Another form in which caste has played a political role and has helped to ameliorate people's socio-economic conditions is the organisation in caste-associations. Often this form of organisation developed out of the effort to just gain a higher status in the caste hierarchy as described above. However, the demands were soon extended to education and other social benefits as well as to political representation. It has been pointed out that in the caste association, caste acquires the additional character of a voluntary organisation.<sup>18</sup> While one is still born into one's caste, to form and enter the association requires a voluntary decision. In this process, the whole character of caste changes considerably since the reasons for loyalty are no longer the traditional ones but the socio-political goals and the sources of leadership and authority within the association follow political criteria and not the traditional one of seniority. While often caste loyalties in the election process give the whole event a narrow minded and communalist character, it must also be seen that organisation in caste associations was an important means of self-assertion at the disposal of the urban and rural petty-bourgeois classes which must probably be seen as a specific feature in the development of Indian capitalism.

### 3. Family

In any scarcity society which has a high rate of unemployment, the family provides a network of security to the individual which is virtually indispensable. Compared herewith, affluent industrialised societies in which both women and men have a high degree of social security, independent of each other due to availability of employment usually have a very high rate of divorce and betray much less emotional attachment to the family even where it is not dissolved. This in itself indicates that the structure of family has decisively to do with mode of production, unfolding of productive forces and division of labour. Nevertheless, it is obviously extremely difficult to acknowledge this relationship because most discussions on family are highly charged with emotions and value judgements. The "sacredness" of the family is frequently conjured up, politicians like to stress that a healthy and happy family is the basic cell of an intact society and cultural traditions as well as

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18. See for example, Lloyd. I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, "The Modernity of Tradition. Political Development in India", Orient Longmans, 1969.

religious sanction shape and accentuate certain attitudes and a distinct lifestyle which develops a certain autonomy and therefore does not automatically change with the relations of production. The strong emotions focussing on certain family patterns are easily understandable if one takes into account that normally each member of society is born into a certain setting and comes to know the world and life as a whole within this specific structure. It is nowadays acknowledged, by psychological research that basic attitudes in a person are decisively shaped within the first three years of life. This means they are shaped more by the medium of sensual and emotional perception than intellectually. Analysis and reasoning only develop on top of the basic mental make-up shaped in early childhood. This does not mean that these early acquired attitudes and emotions could not change due to new insights, but it means that the change may be slow and sometimes painful because it meets with resistance at the unconscious level.

The very fact that the structure of the family so linked up with the mode of production and division of labour means that the patterns of living together are not only subjected to change throughout history but also that they will vary according to class background. Besides, it means that a revolutionary transformation of the socio-economic and political structure of society will inevitably affect the structure of family. A massive breakdown of the traditional pattern of living together can be observed in all the great revolutions whether it be the French, the Russian, the Chinese, the Cuban or the Vietnamese.<sup>19</sup> From all this follows that there is neither any one "natural", leave alone "sacred" way of living together but that the acknowledged pattern of living together is rather strenuously maintained by projecting certain roles and values and enforcing their implementation by social pressures. The pivotal point in the family set up is usually the role which is ascribed to the women on the one hand and the authority which is given to the male and the ranking of age, on the other.

An analysis of the historical development of the family was given by the theoreticians of the socialist movement in the nineteenth century, who on the one hand used the available anthropological data and on the other the critical tools of dialectical materialism. The most influential study in this field was of Frederick Engels: "The Origin of the Family,

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19. These changes have been documented by Sheila Rowbotham, "Woman, Resistance and Revolution", Penguin, 1974.

Private Property and the State."<sup>20</sup> Engels distinguishes the epochs of "savagery", "Barbarism" and "civilization", a very crude pattern which is difficult to verify historically in a strict sense. All the same, the general guidelines of the study are valid and helpful.

Savagery would mean a primitive stage of tribalism in which life was maintained by food-gathering and later the most simple techniques of hunting (with clubs, bows and arrows). This stage is characterised by complete absence of private property and absence of sexual taboos. Group marriage is common. "Barbarism" is characterized by the development of certain useful techniques like pottery, cultivation of plants and domestication and breeding of cattle. In the invention of some of these techniques (e.g. early agriculture), women made the decisive contribution. This led to a more settled life and the production of surplus. Population began to grow and the development of techniques led to division of labour and formation of social classes. Pair marriage became common but still women were the crucial link within the family because it was motherhood which could be determined beyond doubt while fatherhood in a society without strict sexual taboos remained a matter of guessing. Division of labour led to the confinement of woman to the house where she prepared food, clothes and participated in agriculture while the men's task was procurement of food, cattle-breeding and warfare. Since surplus led to growth in population, women got more tied to the task of childbearing, thus producing valuable labour power. But as yet this did not lead to their strict subordination.

The decisive change in roles came with the emergence of private property. Herds and flocks became an increasingly valuable asset and agriculture yielded marketable surplus. This made the food procuring and cattle-breeding activities of men economically more valuable than the tasks of reproduction which were carried out by women. The subjugation of women was completed with the transition to private ownership of land, cattle and implements. This went together with the imposition of strict monogamy and of massive sexual control over women since it became important to safeguard the rights of inheritance. Thus, the ideal of female chastity has direct causal relationship with the emergence of private property in the means of production. Besides, it is obvious that it is the possessing classes which can afford to keep their women out of the production process and to subject them to

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20. A critical summary of Engels' thesis is given in Shivaraman. Shivaraman further discusses modern feminist movements and the role of women in capitalist societies.

strict controls while those classes who have to sell their labour power and have to involve their women in productive work will find it more difficult to impose strict control. Of course the strict control over women requires a whole ideology of male superiority and the glorification of the wife and mother roles. This ideology of female inferiority, chastity and submissiveness designed to keep housewives under control also gets easily imposed on women of the lower classes since there is always a tendency among the oppressed to take over the ideology of the oppressor as has been amply shown by Frantz's famous studies on colonialism and by Paulo Freire's inquiries into the "pedagogy of the oppressed". By the same token, women have willingly internalized the idea of their own inferiority, but find it difficult to develop new attitudes everywhere they have rationally understood the mechanisms of oppression.

To come back to Engels' analysis and applying it to the Indian situation, we can see that due to the tremendous unevenness in economic as well as cultural development and also according to the differences in the class situation, we have wide variations in patterns of family. At the same time the dominant ideology projects the values of emotional attachment to the joint family, patterns of authority according to age and the ideals of chastity and "Indian womanhood". These values have been powerfully reinforced by religion, especially Brahminism. Manu Smriti declared woman to be, per definition dependent, never a free person but always under tutelage as someone's daughter, sister, wife or mother and protected through this very relationship. Women of whatever caste were considered periodically as ritually unclean and were traditionally excluded from acquiring knowledge. This pattern is perpetuated even in modern advertising which induces fathers to save for the education of their sons and the marriage of their daughters. Even where women do have access to education or where they earn their own money, they are expected to take over the whole responsibility of household and children and to adjust to the traditional role.<sup>21</sup>

It is therefore quite obviously impossible to expect transformation of family patterns from any middle class based "women's liberation" movement as was developed in the West. Indian women will have to draw on their rural and tribal resources if they want to mobilise their potential of participation in society. It is however often questioned whether a change of family structures is at all necessary in India since

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21. See for example, Promilla Kapur, "Marriage and the Working Women in India", Vikas Publications, 1972.

the family is not recognised as an oppressive institution and people emphasize that Indian women are not oppressed but held in high esteem. Yet, it is only necessary to look at some simple indicators of socio-economic and political power or powerlessness to become aware of the real situation.<sup>22</sup>

Women in India in practice have hardly any property rights, except for some communities which have preserved some matriarchal remnants.<sup>23</sup> They are therefore economically dependent on fathers, husbands and sons and the institution of dowry, which is a tremendous social burden to most families, is maintained with the argument that it provides a minimal social security for women. In agriculture and in many other jobs women's wages are far below those of men. Women also suffer much more from unemployment and underemployment and the percentage of women in the labour force, especially in industries, has been steadily declining.<sup>24</sup> Politically, women are highly underrepresented at all levels from the panchayat to the highest echelons of government. Social discrimination is most blatant and starts already with the widespread disappointment at the birth of a baby-girl and expresses itself even nowadays in rampant infanticide of girls, if not by direct violence then by neglect. India is nearly the only country in the world where men outnumber women which is probably due to neglect of female infants and high mortality rate of women in child birth.<sup>25</sup> Women have far less access to any kind of

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22. For basic data, see "Status of Women in India; A synopsis of the Report of the National Committee", ICSSR, New Delhi, 1975.

23. Of course, often dowry is considered as a form of inheritance but in fact, it only contributes to make female offspring a liability to their families.

24. The percentage of women in the total labour force has come down from 34.44% in 1911 to 31.53% in 1961 and to 17.35% in 1971. While part of the gap between 1961 and 1971 is due to redefinitions, the general downward trend is undisputed. Gail Omvedt in Social Scientist, No. 61, has adjusted the criteria of definition for 1971 and gives the decline between 1961 and 71 as 31.53% to 22.46%. Women's employment in industries has declined from 31.43% in 1951 to 9.1% in 1971, i.e., a decline of 21.7%. In the mines, it has even declined by 47.4%.

25. In all age groups below 40, the expectation of life for females is lower than that of males. The ratio of females to males has been declining steadily between 1901 and 1971 from 972 per thousand, to 930 per thousand op. cit., p. 7.

education than men<sup>26</sup> and their subordination within the family as well as in public life is largely taken for granted.

It is often argued that these criteria for power and powerlessness are not suitable for the measurement of women's oppression since they are flatly egalitarian and do not take female biology and the special female character into account. Besides, women are supposed to be compensated for their situation by the strong emotional attachment of their beloved ones, their strong indirect influence on decision-making, and the fulfilment of motherhood. It is also maintained that they are equipped by nature with extraordinary endurance and capacity to suffer and also lack aspiration for the above indicated positions of power and public responsibility. That the latter qualities which can indeed be perceived in many women are the unavoidable result of a society which denies women any broader participation, and are also a product of unremitting indoctrination and social pressure, is rarely acknowledged. Many arguments on "female nature" desperately resemble what was said on "slave-mentality" by the white masters in the US or South Africa and what was maintained on "Indian mentality" by the Britishers, each of these respective oppressors drawing on "biology".

It is acknowledged nowadays that the structure and size of the family and therefore the notions about the female role have to change in order to safeguard the very survival of mankind. The present birth rate being what it is, India will be the most populous country in the world before long. Already now every fifth baby in the world is an Indian. Even if the nation succeeds in building up a development concept which is labour intensive and in which people are considered to be an asset and not a liability,—as, e.g. the People's Republic of China did—strict regulations of the birth rate are unavoidable. If these are to be implemented not by compulsion but by conviction, it is necessary to invent female roles which do not derive their sole fulfilment from childbearing, and childrearing and to give women access to education and diversified responsibilities in society. This again is possible if not only lifestyles change on a large scale but also psychological attitudes and expectations and the whole subtle network of social pressures. Household and childrearing must be made a collective responsibility which is equally shared by men and women. Since it cannot be expected of the State to reorganise

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26. The literacy rate among women was 18.4% against 39.5% for males in 1971. Of course, the gap widens considerably with higher standards of education. While in the age group 6-11 years, 66% of girls attend School, attendance falls to 22% in the 11-14 years group.

these responsibilities in the near future, our immediate task is to invent new and revolutionary lifestyles in any movement for people's organisation. This would mean that people would have to overcome cherished attitudes and even change their food habits, since traditionally Indian cooking is a backbreaking full-time job. Experience has shown that food habits die hard and to change them requires enormous efforts.



## ARE MALE AND FEMALE ROLES INTERCHANGEABLE?

Experience in people's organisation has shown that the participation of women in political processes is extremely vital in building up a movement. This was already recognized and acted upon by Gandhi during the freedom movement and has been proved in many local situations.<sup>27</sup> But it is necessary to recognise certain specific socio-economic and psychological factors which are characteristic of the Indian situation, having a bearing on the potential for involvement. It is generally easier to organise women who are involved in the production process. Since unemployment and underemployment are rampant in India and women are more victimised by this than men, the potential for women's organisation at this level is limited. It is also necessary to gain the men's solidarity if it comes to struggles for equal wages which were e.g. achieved in the Shahada movement. Beyond the work sphere, it is possible and necessary to involve women in programmes of public health, mother and child programmes, children's education and even in projects which give them earning capacity since this enhances their independence and gains the approval of their relatives at the same time. It is, however, necessary to try to integrate such activities into a broader perspective of transformation of society since otherwise they

27. See for example the two articles of Omvedt. See also the very instructive paper which Chaya Dutta read at the Trivandrum Conference of Indian Women, which the Indian School of Social Science held in December, 1975.

get stuck in a social welfare approach which may create new dependencies. Generally it is easier to organise women in a broader people's movement than to organise them separately. Once they get involved in such a movement, they are often even bolder than the men and develop amazing stamina while women who are tied to their traditional role are only concerned with the welfare of their own family and try to keep their men out of political action and labour struggles since these involve family risks. Generally, the wide responsibilities of mutual support in the family pose a severe problem in any people's movement since they induce the individual to play safe and to be concerned with his own narrow interest. Since any public responsibility for social security is not within reach for the majority of people, the only solution is extended responsibility for each other within the people's movement, transcending the bonds of blood.

Similar problems arise with respect to the problem of getting married. Many people's organisers feel they cannot get married because they cannot divide their loyalties between a movement and a family while at the same time the pressures of society are such that not getting married is hardly an acceptable option.

It is therefore necessary to develop lifestyles which permit for a plurality of options and do not isolate and ostracise unmarried individuals, especially women. This also means to live in larger groups where married and unmarried people join together and share responsibility for each other as well as for the education of children. Marriage in this case cannot have the sole objective of founding a family and giving social security, but must be based on a shared commitment to the transformation of society. The question here is not so much love marriage or arranged marriage but much more whether the partners are equally committed to work for the larger society. Since, due to their conservative education and their role as mothers, women are often much more reluctant on this point, this is an obvious example where the liberation of women also works in the interest of men.

Economically as well as culturally, the role of women is less restricted in low caste groups which have a higher percentage of working women. This is especially true for Adivasi and Dalit groups. Due to lack of property, these are also the groups which are not tied to the concept of joint family and in terms of religion they are least "sanskritized." It is therefore evident that in the transformation of the family and the position of women this tribal and low caste ferment will have to play an important role. In the course of the women's movement in India we can perceive tendencies parallel to the general freedom movement. Initial leadership was highly elitist

and British as well as missionary influences played a role. Gandhi then succeeded to mobilise Hindu values in order to popularise the idea of liberation and to arouse mass participation. As in many other fields, the values propagated by him were quite ambiguous and somewhat obscurantist. The leading figures were taken from the epics, Draupadi and Sita, and the appeal was towards suffering, self-sacrifice and service—all values which in fact contribute to the oppression of women but which in this historical moment where the suffering and self-sacrifice could be directed against an outward enemy, had a unique mobilising impact. After defeating the outward enemy, these values can only contribute to women's oppression and therefore the new ferment comes from involvement of women in class-struggle. This will, however, not solve the problem of roles and attitudes automatically. The psychological part of the problem has to be worked out in its own rights.

An important aspect of shaping the concept of family, lies no doubt in the childrearing patterns. Different attitudes towards girls and boys are very common and generally the educational pattern is geared toward adjustment, conflict avoidance and subordination. Definitely a rethinking of childrearing patterns has political implications and likewise the goal of people's participation in political processes requires new patterns of childrearing. This however is a field which has so far remained largely untouched.

#### 4. Village

Since 80% of the Indian population live in villages, it is obvious that the frame of mind of the vast majority of people in this country is shaped by rural living conditions, and we have to ask ourselves what is the cultural impact of this fact. John Maliekal, in his booklet on post-independence economic policies in this CSA series, has pointed out that the agricultural sector deserves priority in Indian planning and has been grossly neglected in all the Five Year Plans since independence. After the last election, the Janata party has laid much emphasis on the development of the rural sector, without, however, developing any clear strategy how to protect small scale industry from the competition of the monopoly houses since the private ownership in means of production is not supposed to be touched.<sup>28</sup> There is again a strong projection of Gandhian economic values which can be characterized in

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28. See for example, Charan Singh, "India's Economic Policy. The Gandhian Blueprint", Vikas, New Delhi, 1978.

the same way as the Gandhian Plan of 1944, namely as an effort to create a new "economic morality, preaching the virtues of simplicity, manual labour, local self-sufficiency, decentralisation and the independent village community".<sup>29</sup> The basic power-structure of the society seems to be tackled only at a level of moral appeal. The concept of "trusteeship" which failed already as a means of land-distribution in the Bhoodhan and Gramdan campaigns<sup>30</sup> is now applied with fresh vigour to the industrial sector when it comes to prevent the big industrialists from crushing small scale village industries. The expectations are high: "What would be avoided are both private capitalism and State ownership which Gandhi dreaded—and not without good reason—as many more realize today than when he was alive.

But in this matter of fact world it is not possible to persuade owners to give up effective control of industry merely by appealing to their benevolence and sense of national duty. A world teacher that he was, the Mahatma talked of the ultimate and set heights which are not easy to scale, at least today. Yet, the Janata Party would like to make an experiment of trusteeship in selected spheres, somewhat on the lines advocated by him,"—so far the concluding words of Charan Singh's "Gandhian Blueprint."<sup>31</sup>

In order to assess the realism of these new policies projecting a rural bias, we have not only to measure them against the methods with which they are supposed to be implemented, but also have to try to understand the cultural values which underlie the newly emphasized concept of "village-economy". We have to understand the dynamisms of village structure and ask what they imply for the perspective of people's organisation and mass mobilisation which we characterized as an essential precondition of development in India.

While in the classical Marxist understanding the urban industrial proletariat is the vanguard of the revolution, developments in countries like China, Vietnam and Tanzania have shown that there is sometimes an unforeseen revolutionary

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29. S. N. Agarwal quoted by John Maliekal, op. cit., p. 15, commenting on the Gandhian Plan of 1944.

30. See John Maliekal, ibid., p. 41; see also K. R. Nanekar/S. V. Khandewale "Bhoodan and the landless", Bombay, 1973; and T. K. Oomen "Charisma, Stability and Change. An Analysis of the bhoodan-gramdan movement in India", Thomson Press, New Delhi, 1972.

31. op. cit., pp. 121 f.

potential in peasant societies as well. Of course, in each of these countries, very special socio-economic and historical conditions have to be taken into account and from none of these examples, direct conclusions can be drawn for the Indian situation which has to be understood in its own specificity. But it is significant that even Charan Singh who untiringly marks communism as the arch-enemy, points to precisely these three countries when it comes to quote examples of applied "Gandhian economics" characterised by criteria like labour-intensive technology, decentralization, people's participation, fulfilment of basic needs and self-reliance.<sup>32</sup> What he fails to see is the essential role which people's mobilisation and struggle played in the transformation of these societies.

In India, there has been a traditional emphasis on the stability of the "village community", though opinions vary widely on how to characterize and evaluate it. Marx in his writings on India, though deplored the damaging effects of colonialism, painted a devastating picture of the traditional Indian village: "We must not forget that these idyllic village communities, inoffensive though they may appear, had always been the solid foundation of oriental despotism, that they restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies ... We must not forget that these little communities were contaminated by distinctions of caste and by slavery, that they subjugated man to external circumstances, that they transformed a self-developing social state into a never changing natural destiny, and thus brought about a brutal worship of nature, exhibiting its degradation in the fact that man, the sovereign of nature, fell down on his knees in adoration of Hanuman, the monkey, and Sabbala the cow."<sup>33</sup>

Gandhi, on the other hand, refuted such charges by turning the stability of the village community into a strength: "It is a charge against India that her people are so uncivilised, ignorant and stolid, that it is not possible to induce them to adopt any changes. It is a charge really against our merit. What we have tested and found true on the anvil of experience, we dare not change. Many thrust their advice upon India and she remains steady. This is her beauty; it is the sheet-anchor of

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32. Ibid., p. 115.

33. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: "On Colonialism", Foreign Language Publishing House, Moscow, p. 38.

our hope."<sup>34</sup> However, it is obvious that what he refers to is much more endurance as a strength of character and as a quality which makes people self-reliant, than stability of the village structure as such. Marx, on the other hand, refers to the enslaving character of the village structure as such which finds expression in the acknowledgement of inegalitarian values manifested in caste and exploitation as a "natural law".

There is no doubt that the ancient Indian village community was exploitative and inegalitarian but it was able to safeguard basic social security to all the inhabitants of a village community.<sup>35</sup> The jajmani system, i.e., the bartering of services based on jati, gave everyone the means of livelihood and a secure place in life. As long as enough land was available,—and land-scarcity only developed with colonialism—, the community could simply split like a cell and reproduce itself according to the old pattern as soon as it became too large. Besides, the low degree of specialisation and division of labour between the village community and the outside world, made the farmer rather independent of the latter and made it possible to survive dynastic crises, invasions and economic crises, rather unperturbed.<sup>36</sup>

It is apparently this basic security and stability which Gandhi tried to defend. But, he simply ignored the changes which had occurred since the Muslim invasions and especially since the British takeover which led to the development of private property in land and thus to the formation of classes which are deeply antagonistic in their interests. We need not go into the details here of the development of the Zamindari, jagirdari and ryotwari systems and their legal abolition after independence.<sup>37</sup> But it is necessary to take notice of the effects of these developments.

Land became the determinant factor of class formation. Taxation in cash developed on a large scale and led to the expansion of cash crop cultivation at the expense of subsistence crops. This led to food scarcity. Revenue demands were high

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- 34. From "Hind Swaraj" in "The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi", Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1963, pp. 149 f.
- 35. For much of the analysis of village structure which follows, I am indebted to Goran Djurfeldt and Staffan Lindberg: "Behind Poverty. The Social Formation of a Tamil Village", Oxford & IBH Publishing Co., New Delhi, 1975.
- 36. Ibid., p. 39.
- 37. A brief historical survey was given by John Maliekal, op. cit., pp. 32 ff. See also Djurfeldt/Lindberg, op. cit., pp. 51 ff.

and inflexible which led to indebtedness, growth of usury capital and loss of land among the poorer sections. Colonialism also ruined many artisans, especially the weavers, and thus enhanced the reserve army of landless labour. Population increased the pressure on land. Private ownership in land and market economy replaced the jajmani system. The resulting social imbalance even affected the ecological balance and led to the decay of the irrigation systems, deforestation and more ruthless exploitation of nature.<sup>38</sup> As a result, poverty and exploitation at the village level have reached an unprecedented scale.

Under the present economic set-up, the underdevelopment and exploitation of the rural proletariat is a precondition for sustaining the cities: "If the rural proletariat which produces most of the food in the village had control over the surplus of their labour or if they were paid 'wages' adequate for their subsistence, an urban food crisis would ensue."<sup>39</sup> Even after the bumper harvests of 1975/76 the surplus in food reserves is mainly based on the lack of buying power of those 60% of the population who live below the poverty line and the many others who live at subsistence level. At the same time, this very lack of buying power also keeps the demand for industrial production low and sustains the pattern of luxury production for the elite. To try to overcome this urban-rural contradiction of interests by appeals to "trusteeship" obviously borders on belief in miracles.<sup>40</sup>

But even at the village level, class contradictions are such that a "common interest" of the "village community" can hardly be assumed. Obviously, the unevenness of development in the countryside is such that it is virtually impossible to describe the rural class structure in general. Roughly we can distinguish between (a) the rural proletariat (consisting of landless labourers, tenants, share-croppers, poor farmers, poor artisans), (b) the intermediate classes (consisting of middle farmers, petty traders, etc.) and (c) the exploiters (rich farmers, landlords, money lenders, merchants). Neither land distribution and higher wages nor creation of employment opportunities, can be in the interest of the exploiting sections since all these

38. Ibid , p. 118.

39. Ibid.

40. Djurfeldt and Lindberg point out that the failure of land reform can be explained in the context of the described class-conflict. The lack of political will to implement land reform is finally dictated by the common interest of the urban and rural exploiters to keep the rural proletariat in its present condition. Ibid., p. 155, note 50.

are bound to diminish their margin of profit.<sup>41</sup> It is therefore evident why the community development programme, which was launched on Gandhi Jayanti 1952, had to fail miserably. It envisaged the "harmonisation" of conflicting interests and denounced the encouragement of "sectional interests" as "totalitarian approach".<sup>42</sup> Though people's participation was emphasised, it was made clear that it should also be contained and not develop into a movement: "The greatest asset of community development is not that it has grown into a movement but that it is a method by which all the technical services of Government can be channelled down to meet and assist the gigantic developing potential power of hundreds of thousands of effectively organised village groups."<sup>43</sup> It is evident that this "effective organisation" which presupposes the prevention of mass-mobilisation will work out in the interest of the exploiters, the village class-set-up being what it is.



It is very strange to see that, while the emphasis in the Gandhian approach and in the community development concept is all the time on the community and the common good of all, the underlying values are thoroughly individualistic and inegalitarian. This is once again very clearly expressed by Charan Singh: "The peasant is an incorrigible individualist;

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41. Djurfeldt/Lindberg give examples how the exploiters in the village try to deviate development projects to other places (p. 200).
42. B. Mukerji, "Community Development in India", Orient Longmans, 1961, pp. 8 ff.
43. Ibid., p. 11.

his vocation, season in and season out, can be carried out with a pair of bullocks or a small machine in the solitude of nature without the necessity of having to give orders or take orders from anybody. That is why the peasant class everywhere is the only class which is really democratic without mental reservations."<sup>44</sup> Private ownership of family-sized farms is seen as a safeguard of democracy, while the basically inequitable and selfish character of "human nature" is conjured up in order to make clear that co-operative farming or collectivization of agriculture has no chance whatsoever: "It is utopian to expect that an average householder will, all of a sudden, identify his interests with those of the hundreds of persons in the village or neighbourhood who were hitherto total strangers to his life.... (Man) is governed more by heart than by mind and the heart has not yet made (whether it ever will make it is doubtful) the same advance as the mind which has narrowed down physical space and made the world a smaller place than it was in the days of our forefathers. Scientific progress in control of the outer world has not resulted in greater control of the inner world of the self, without which a large joint economic undertaking cannot be run smoothly or successfully. Man remains as selfish or greedy, proud or jealous, and ambitious as in the days of Mahabharata."<sup>45</sup>

The mistrust in the ethical qualities of the "average householder"—who after all might at least have an economic gain by collectivization, as experiences in various socialist countries have shown—is in blatant contrast to the confidence in the selflessness of the exploiter who is supposed to transform himself into a "trustee", though he himself would only have to lose in the process. These individualistic and inequitable values reproduce the negative implications of the caste system which is basically elitist, paternalistic and finally geared towards individual salvation within the existing system of injustice.

This deeply ingrained inequitable, with respect to caste and class as well as with respect to male-female roles, is a traditional characteristic of village structure which can be perceived in all the "classical" anthropological studies on Indian villages.<sup>46</sup> Hence, broadly, though certainly not strictly, caste hierarchy corresponds to class hierarchy and the

44. op. cit., p. 16.

45. Ibid., pp. 18 f.

46. See for example, M. N. Srinivas, "The Remembered Village", Oxford University Press, 1976, pp. 155, 167 ff., 211 ff., *passim*.

traditional homogeneous religious ideology serves to stabilise the basically inegalitarian ideology of the "village community". As Djurfeldt/Lindberg points out: "'Community' is obviously an euphemism here, which should be interpreted as 'dominant jati as a collective unity (community).'"<sup>47</sup>

Since the jajmani system has lost its economic reality due to the market economy and a certain amount of social mobility has also become possible, the strictness of the caste-hierarchy cannot be maintained. We have seen in our section on caste, that jati can even be used as a vehicle of climbing the social ladder. The old system of "co-operation" becomes substituted by "competition" in the capitalist set-up. But it is evident that the traditional value system, sugar-coated by the pseudo-egalitarian ideology of "village community", can more easily be transformed into the pseudo-egalitarian competition of capitalism than into a truly egalitarian system of socialism. The elitism of the old and of the new value system leaves as the common denominator the ethos of "betting on the strong."<sup>48</sup>

It must, however, be pointed out that the inegalitarian values underlying the idea of the "village community" are by no means essential to the rural bias in development. As it was rightly stated, the strong points in the Gandhian development concept like simple life-style, intermediate technology, labour intensive village industries and self-reliance—, were only implemented in rural societies which made the effort to overcome the private ownership in means of production as a necessary precondition for our egalitarian society.<sup>49</sup> Since India is already in the 9th place of industrialized nations in the world, her people face extraordinary difficulties in gearing the priorities of planning towards the needs of the majority. Again, it is evident that mobilisation of the rural masses is a necessary precondition for expressing their legitimate needs.

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47. op. cit., p. 38, note 9.

48. This expression was coined by Wertheim; see for example, his paper "Betting on the Strong", in A. R. Desai: "Rural Sociology", Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1969, pp. 894 ff. An alternative concept has been spelled out by Reinhild Traitler in her paper, "People's Participation in Development", in CCPD dossier No. 9, "Betting on the Weak", WCC, Geneva.

49. A most instructive example of village-level revolution is given in William Hinton's book, "Fanshar. A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village", Penguin Books, 1972.

It is also important to see the dominant ideologies of caste, capitalism, "community development" and of "trusteeship" as ideologies of the ruling elites which need not be shared by the oppressed sections of society. Though there is the tendency of the oppressed to imitate the values of the oppressor, there is also scope for shedding these values in a process of conscientization and to develop an understanding of reality which expresses the true class interests. The depressed castes and classes have so far mainly remained a "silent majority", confined to a "culture of silence". There is, however, no doubt that in the process of asserting their rights, they need to find their own cultural self-expression in which the matrix of village culture loses its ambiguous character and achieves a breakthrough towards liberation.

## 5. Religion

It is virtually impossible to make any general statements on the role which Indian religions have played in shaping or impeding an ethos of development or to pinpoint how they have interfered with processes of technological innovations or processes of politicisation. It is, however, essential to counteract general biases about the "other-worldliness" or "spirituality" of Indian religion, which furthers disinterest in wordly matters in people or about the "superstition" and "fatalism" of the so-called average villager, which makes his mind inaccessible to analytical reasoning, since these cliches tend to be more misleading than enlightening and hinder a clear understanding of how religion really operates in concrete situations and why.

It was already pointed out that the role of religion in society has to be analysed at different levels. A content analysis of religious ideas, convictions, beliefs, and values is no doubt necessary but one has to go on and ask who produces the ideas, who believes in them, how these values operate further when they are put in practice, in order to get a comprehensive picture. Very often the study of religion is confined to a study of *ideas*, abstract from the study of society. This way, one arrives at abstractions which give a very incomplete and misleading picture of human reality and which do not allow any conclusions on the question, how culture and religion influence the development process.

While the role of religion in development can only be studied in concrete situations, some general observations may be helpful in order to make case studies easier. Studies of Hinduism as well as other religions are more often than not based on the analysis of Scriptures. The written tradition of

the Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas and Epics has shaped the image of Hinduism, while the overwhelming majority of the people have been illiterate and have been affected only by oral tradition which gives only fragments and local variations of the written form, the frame of mind of the people has been shaped by their local festivals, the life-cycle from birth to death and the protection from hazards and calamities, while one had to cope with daily survival. In coping with daily survival, the question is, to what effect religion is practiced. It can be practiced in order to achieve "peace of mind" or it can be practiced in order to express protest. Even if achievement of peace of mind is the goal—which is frequently the case—this can affect people in a different way: it can make them fatalistic and inactive or it can make them strong and tenacious in what they pursue in life, even if it is social change. On the other hand, if protest is expressed, this does not necessarily mean that the process of social change will be furthered because religious protest can become a surrogate for social change and thus in fact promote fatalism. It is therefore necessary to have a critical understanding of people's ideas and actions and to see them in a comprehensive framework of social reality.

It is often assumed that Indian religions have hardly produced a ferment of social protest and that they either promote disinterest in life or the perpetuation of exploitative structures as e.g., expressed in caste. While it is true that on the level of ideas, the pursuance of moksha (religious salvation or liberation) meant release from the law of karma and samsara and riddance from the drudgery of bodily life altogether—which seems to render social structure completely irrelevant—it is a historical fact that Indian history is not at all devoid of movements of religious protest. A good number of these movements have been studied by Stephen Fuchs in an analysis of messianic movements in Indian religions.<sup>50</sup> While such movements have sprung up in different moments in history and from different religious backgrounds as e.g., tribalism, Hinduism, Islam etc., they have certain general traits in common: the dissatisfaction with oppressive socio-economic conditions, emotional unrest, the appearance of a charismatic leader, obedience to this leader and radical change of life, rebellion against established authorities, the punishment of traitors to the movement, the remembrance of a Golden Age in the past and "revivalism", i.e., adaptation of other religious traits and "eschatologism" or millenarism, i.e., in the hope for a better future in the form of some Kingdom of God or a perfect society. Not one of the messianic

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50. "Rebellious Prophets", Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1965.

movements analysed, need have all of these traits together. But they express the same tendency and, during the time of the British raj, frequently led to the anti-colonial struggle of the freedom movement. It is therefore not amazing that several of the messianic movements analysed by Stephen Fuchs also occur in the analysis of peasant rebellions which was carried out by Kathleen Gough.<sup>51</sup> In many cases, a direct link between religious and political protest is evident; but it is important to acknowledge that the protest is found to fail and to end in disaster if it remains confined to the religious field and devoid of a sober socio-economic and political analysis.

Quite a number of the messianic movements analysed by Fuchs sprang up from a tribal background among Bhils, Santals, Mundas, etc. In terms of religious content, these tribals either draw on their own tradition or they borrow ideas from "higher" Hinduism. This means that even "Sanskritisation" i.e., imitation of more "sanskritic" forms of religion, can work both ways: it may mean being absorbed into the social stagnation of the caste-fold or it may serve to express a new social identity in protest against the religion from which one borrows ideas and rituals.

The dialectics between tribal religion on the one hand and Brahmin Hinduism on the other extreme can balance in a harmony of contrasts or can burst into open contradiction. Often the balance is maintained for a long period only in order to break up under certain socio-economic constraints. Richard Lannoy has characterized the relationship in the following way: "Dominant peoples like those they hold in subjection to remain as they imagine them—lazy, feckless, libidinous—because it confirms their self-image as industrious, orderly, adult and socially organized. The corollary is that the subject-peoples represent a *negative identity* in the unconscious of the dominant —what it has been warned *not* to become. Such a negative identity can acquire great psychic potency among disaffected elements of the dominant people, a rejuvenating catalyst sufficient to spark revolution within its social system."<sup>52</sup> The result is an interplay between psychological repression and the persistent vitality of popular culture. In this context, it cannot be considered as incidental that many movements of social protest and successful experiments in people's organisation and formation of political movements have sprung up among tribals and the cultural expressions of this protest deserve closer study.

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51. "Indian Peasant Uprisings", in EPW vol IX, Nos 32-34 (Special Number 1974), pp. 1391-1412.

52. "The Speaking Tree", Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1971, pp. 169 ff.

The question remains as to how these people's movements which spring up from the bottom of society, relate to the dominant culture which remains in oppressive stagnation or tries to rejuvenate itself through inner reforms. The most well-known and conspicuous effort at religious reform in recent Indian history was no doubt the so-called Hindu Renaissance which aimed at the modernization of Hinduism under a more rational and scientific outlook and tried to propagate indigenous values against the influence of Western culture, while on the other hand imitating forms of religious organisation and education introduced by Christian missionaries. There is no doubt that the Hindu Renaissance made an important contribution to the freedom struggle in stabilising the identity of the educated elite and in fighting obscurantist social customs like untouchability, sati, child marriage and the like. But of course this was a cultural transformation which politically only went together with bourgeois liberalism and never reached the rural masses of the people apart from those values of the renaissance which were later propagated by Gandhi on a mass scale. While social reform was part of the message of the renaissance, leaders like Ram Mohan Roy, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Aurobindo et al, were either no political fighters or left the struggle for spiritual gains. Their message remained confined to the privileged classes and the core of their teaching was individual spiritual perfection, rather irrespective of the socio-economic structure of society. The question—whose privilege spiritual perfection in an exploitative society unavoidably was not thoroughly raised. Transformation of society was assumed to result more or less automatically from individual spiritual perfection.

No doubt the Renaissance produced some theological developments which are politically interesting. The reinterpretation of the Bagavad Gita by such different leaders as Ranade, Tilak, Aurobindo, Gandhi, Vinoba et al. shows clearly how the socio-economic conditions and political commitments have an impact on the content of religious ideas. Similarly, it became evident that a modernized form of Advaita-Vedanta need not be socially and ethically indifferent but can be combined with the idea of equality of all human beings, since the ultimate reality is present in all.

Important impulses of transformation arose from the bhakti movements which laid emphasis on a personal relationship with one God who has concern and mercy for people. Emphasis on love and mercy fostered these qualities also in interhuman relationships and therefore caste discrimination, discrimination between the sexes and socio-economic differences could more easily be overcome in the bhakti-sects. Besides personal devotion, worship in groups and singing

of bhajans became popular and enforced a spirit of solidarity. Though a mystical relationship with god was at the core of the bhakti-faith, it was much less individualistic than the much more intellectual speculations on salvation along the path of advaita. Under modern conditions, bhakti-faith can easily go together with a socio-political commitment.

It is important to be aware of the fact that religion has an impact on people's attitudes towards social change also where it does not explicitly resort to social and ethical teachings. Since Hinduism has an extremely decentralised organisation and great doctrinal variety, these indirect influences are at least equally important as explicit ethical exhortations. At the same time, the content of faith and rituals and the meaning of religious convictions are deeply affected by the experiences which people make in daily life and by the question how they experience their own power or powerlessness. Village religion for one is mainly concerned with the preservation of life, fertility of man and nature, birth and death, cure from disease, protection from evil spirits and restitution of social harmony in festivals. It is often assumed that this kind of religion can be only characterized as "magic" and "superstition". It is however evident that on the whole, village religion has the potential of fostering a positive attitude towards life. There is nothing wrong in desiring a fertile and abundant life, free from disease and fear, and social harmony. The question is whether religious ritual excludes or tries to substitute a self-reliant and responsible mastering of one's life or whether religion tries to support responsible human efforts. This question can only be answered in concrete cases. My own studies among Harijan landless labourers in Tamil Nadu seem to allow the conclusion that wherever people get organised and experience their own power in action, even village religion need not be in blatant conflict with this experience but can be supportive and complementary. In this case, people's organisers will need to develop a different attitude than in cases where there is open conflict between political involvement and religious loyalties.

Another indirect relationship between religion and development can be observed in the religious fashions which come up among middle class and lower middle class people. The spreading of pilgrimages and the building of new wayside shrines belong to this category. Often a new religious activity goes together with the effort to climb up the social ladder. Religious "insurance" compensates for social hazards, or religious activity expresses a new status. A more precise understanding of such forms of religious self-expression definitely broadens the spectrum of socio-economic analysis and helps to comprehend the values and motivations of people in a deeper way.

On the whole, little effort has been made to rethink the day to day Hindu traditions by people who are involved in development work and people's organisation. There is however no doubt that many of these practices are open to new interpretations. Most of the popular festivals e.g. have a meaning which can be newly discovered. The Pongal festival in Tamil Nadu, which is a harvest festival to celebrate the plentifullness of nature, lends itself for reflections as to why it is that the abundance of the soil is not available to all, whether there should be private property of land and the like. Dipavali, which as a festival of light celebrates the victory of light over darkness, can be connected with the question, what are the dark and light forces in society. During Dassera, people not only worship Saraswati, the goddess of education and learning but in Ayudha puja they worship their tools. Such occasions can be used to raise questions about the accessibility and content of education and the question of ownership in means of production. Likewise, during Dassera, people in the South make an exhibition of dolls in their house which represents the different aspects of the world and of life in general. This allows for the question, what life is like for the majority of people in our society. It is only due to the separation of religion and political involvement that such opportunities are normally not used.

### 3. Cultural Action in the Struggle for Liberation

In the preceding chapter, we dealt with certain cultural factors which have a bearing on the development process in our country. We are now focussing our interest on situations in which people have taken action in order to change the values which dominate society. They have made a determined effort to change the culture they were living in and to create new values and new goals in society. The effort to give society a new direction and to change its value is not new. Throughout history there have been reform movements which tried to give people's lives a new direction. But in ancient times, such movements were created by a ruler like, e.g., Ashoka or they were sparked off by religious reformers. It is a modern phenomenon that cultural action takes place in the form of mass struggle. Of course, certain cultural changes take place more or less automatically, due to changes in the economic structure and/or the political system. But often these changes are accidental and ambiguous. As long as people only focus on the economic and political struggle, it may also occur that their cultural values remain unchanged and this may strangle their creativity and poison their lives.

While any revolution creates new forms of cultural expression, it has become obvious that this cultural change cannot be taken for granted; it has to be aimed at already long in advance and it has to be pursued even long after the political revolution is achieved. One of the most telling examples in this respect is the Chinese revolution. Mao himself started off as a teacher and one of the social evils which spurred his imagination was the constraint of forced arranged marriage at a tender age which often led to the suicide of young girls. He also fought the elitism of the educational system and later the party drilled all cadres to learn from the people, to value manual labour, never to loot people's property, to pursue strict honesty and to gain the confidence of the masses. Even after the revolution, it was admitted that continuous cultural revolution was needed and the confusing propaganda against "capitalist roaders" shows that people are conscious that the values of the old society had not been overcome by conquering political power and socializing the means of production. That cultural change does not occur automatically can also be seen in the history of the Russian revolution which sparked off tremendous cultural creativity in the initial stage but relapsed into conservatism and rigidity under the impact of the economic

crisis which culminated in the atrocities of Stalinist mass murders. To de-Stalinize society again needed a cultural campaign and even now this process is incomplete.

It would be erroneous to think that cultural action at a mass level only takes place in the wake of political revolutions. There is no doubt that the industrial revolution in the West and the tremendously incisive technological changes—especially those since the middle of the present century—have made an intense impact on people's lives and outlook on a mass scale. These changes in value and outlook not only affect the "advanced" capitalist societies but are also imposed on Third World countries through the world market, the arms race, multinationals, import of technology, educational contacts, mass media and many other factors. While early capitalism propagated thrift and industrious attitudes, late capitalism propagates consumerism and leisure-pleasure. Under the mass brainwash of television and advertisement, people get "co-ordinated", wearing an invisible straight jacket which forces them to conform to capitalist values for better or worse even at the cost of disastrous destruction of their environment for the sake of economic growth. Cultural action here takes the forms of mass manipulation under the label of freedom. Only in recent years people in the West have got an inkling that they may have embarked on a road which leads to disaster and recent mass actions of protest against nuclear energy production in countries like West Germany and France, show that people start to question the dominant values in their society and are determined to take action against them in order to create a culture of their own choice.

In India, we find a mixture of feudal, capitalist and socialist values in a system of production which is predominantly capitalist. We have the dominant high-caste elitism on the one hand and the more egalitarian values of tribals and low-caste or harijan people which however, remain without power, the real conflict being glossed over by a fiction of constitutionally guaranteed Western egalitarianism. Equality is not implemented because the competitive "freedom" of capitalism reinforces the existing injustice of the traditional society and creates new injustice on top of it. Neither the nationalist movement nor post-independence history have brought about a cultural revolution in India. Even the Leftist parties have mainly focussed on economic and political issues. We therefore have to look at such movements which have explicitly rallied around issues of cultural revolt and have to ask what these have contributed to the total transformation of society. We will limit ourselves to the non-Brahman movement in Maharashtra as an example since it had a revolutionary content which is largely ignored by present-day activists involved in the transformation of society.

We will, afterwards, try to draw out the lines to situations of cultural transformations all over the world in order to get a clearer grasp of how a new culture can be created. We will ask: what are the methods, which role does cultural action play in the political struggle and is it true that cultural action in the struggle for liberation not only has a local and national but also as international perspective ?

As far as the methods are concerned, we will have a look at the pedagogy of Paulo Freire. For the political theory of cultural action, the insights of Antonio Gramsci are of great help. To understand the connection between local struggles at the village level and the international situation, the thoughts of Roger Garaudy will be an inspiration. However, to find our own forms of cultural action will be left to us in our day-to-day involvement with people. Since, in the limited space which is given to us, we have to be very brief and selective, this chapter in particular intends to encourage the readers to dig into the problems of cultural action on their own.

## 1. The Non-Brahman Movement in Maharashtra

It is the merit of Gail Omvedt's study on cultural revolt in Maharashtra<sup>1</sup> to have pointed to the radical content of the non-Brahman movement and to have analysed why this radicalism remained unfulfilled and could finally be absorbed and neutralised in the nationalist movement. It is the thrust of her book to document that the struggle for equalitarian values is not just the result of a "modernization" process under Western impact but that Indian society has time and again mobilised its own resources of revolt and struggle for a just society. The non-Brahman organisation, the Satyashodak Samaj (Truth Seekers' Society), was founded by Jotirao Phule in 1873 and attained strength between 1911 and 1930. The content of the struggle was already expressed in the terminology of the movement which tried to establish the power of the bahujan samaj (majority community), against shetji bhatji (i.e. against merchant capitalism and Brahman dominance). The class base of the movement was non-Brahman intelligentsia and a strong peasant base joined by a small section of non-Brahman commercial bourgeoisie. Due to this peasant base, the movement not only represented a struggle of contending elites (i.e.,

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1. "Cultural Revolution in a Colonial Society: The Non-Brahman Movement in Western India 1873 to 1930", op. cit.

non-Brahman elite against Brahman elite), but attempted a social revolution against the brahman-dominated Indian intelligentsia and bourgeois elite which was organised in the Indian National Congress.

Under the impact of colonialism, the dominant economic formation in Maharashtra was mercantile capitalism. It was the commercial bourgeoisie which controlled not only trade but also land. This commercial bourgeoisie was dominated by Brahmins, Gujars and Marwars, while non-Brahmins had a small yet important foothold in the contracting section (p.79). The intelligentsia, bureaucracy and the whole educational system were overwhelmingly Brahman dominated (p. 80). This was the constellation which sparked off the non-Brahman revolt.

Religious and cultural traditions of social protest had a long tradition in Maharashtra and were expressed in the Mahanubhav and later the Varkari cult which had a strong impulse of protest against the caste system, though the Varkari cult finally compromised with and was re-absorbed by Brahmanism (pp. 53 ff). It was confronted not only by orthodoxy but even by more radical religious movements. The Varkari saint Tukaram in the 18th century brought religious equalitarianism to a new peak. Brahman claims on the Varkari movement could be contested by the Non-Brahman movement. Likewise, the tradition of the ruler Shivaji was claimed by Brahmins who depicted him as a protector of Hinduism. But the non-Brahmins could contest this claim by pointing to the peasant origin of Shivaji's family. Thus, while the prevailing trend in the religious and cultural tradition was shaped by caste discrimination and oppression, the non-Brahman movement tried to recover the history of protest which had been buried alive in the memory of the people under the impact of oppression.

Jotirao Phule, the founder of the Satyashodak Samaj, was a mali by caste from a small peasant family, who earned his living as a contractor. Culturally, he belonged to the first generation of the Hindu renaissance which "with ruthless self-criticism... sought to lay the ground for a total social transformation, to weld science and rationality to Indian culture, to recreate India." (p. 99). Only the second generation of the renaissance, represented e.g., by Tilak, opted for "modernization" instead of revolutionary social transformation, finally aiming at revitalization of the old society. Gail Omvedt makes plain that the "national revolution", i.e., nationalism as opposed to Western colonial rule, was dominated by bourgeois and high caste traditions. Phule's peasant and anti-caste outlook saw as its enemy the very elite which represented these traditions. It is significant that Phule's strict

equalitarianism comprised also the struggle of women which was fiercely opposed by many of the nationalist leaders. While the nationalist Hindu renaissance was dominated by high caste symbols (e.g. the God Ganesha in Maharashtra, the goddess Kali in Bengal), Phule was not only rationalist but also was open to a positive re-interpretation of peasant deities (p. 115). He was on the other hand hostile even to the local (i.e. Maratha) "great tradition" and promoted peasant culture throughout.

Phule's economic thinking focussed on the problems of the peasantry, but he did not thoroughly analyse the class differences of rich and poor peasants, small landholders and agricultural labourers. However, we should not forget that only since Lenin and Mao, analysis of agricultural classes has entered Marxist thinking. Phule saw British colonialism as economically destructive. Nevertheless, he saw more opportunity of emancipation for non-Brahmans under the British Raj than under Brahman dominance in an independent India. According to his view, the primary conflict was between the peasantry and the elite-dominated bureaucracy. While anti-Brahmanism and social radicalism prevented him from joining the mainstream of nationalism, his radically egalitarian objectives and petitions (sweeping social revolution, heavy expenditure on educational and agricultural development, etc) were contradictory to the colonial government in a way the nationalist demands were not. Finally, Phule's social radicalism remained unfulfilled: "Phule's concern for a revolution of equality in personal relationships—between men and women, among the different castes, within village and family itself—tended to be neglected. The result was that the shift to power toward rural society meant a shift to an unrevolutionized village dominated by a rural elite" (p. 122).

It is important to understand how Phule's radical quests and the equalitarian demands of the peasant masses could be neutralised and finally be reabsorbed into the nationalist movement.

The Satyashodak Samaj after its foundation in 1873 focussed very much on cultural action since it saw Brahmin dominance, which was also prevalent in the economic and political sphere, as a phenomenon which was tenaciously upheld by ritual sanctions. The Samaj members therefore had their rituals performed by non-Brahmans and tackled deep rooted customs like child-marriage, arranged marriage, ban on widow remarriage and also advocated inter-caste marriage though the latter did not become a widespread practice. The movement spread mainly in the countryside which is one of the reasons why it was mainly recorded in Marathi and was largely ignored by non-Marathi speakers. It did however have some correla-

tions with Ramaswamy Naicker's self-respect movement in Madras. The movement gained in momentum in the years before 1910. If we try to characterise it in modern terms we can describe it as a movement which aimed at the conscientization of the masses. The following aspects were expressed in the activities of the movement:

- "(1) a pervading sense of conflict and struggle;
- (2) the emphasis on the awakening of consciousness among people;
- (3) the central role of religious ceremonies performed without a Brahman as the defining criterion for Satyashodhak membership;
- (4) and the result of awakening in intensified educational and economic activities" (p. 154).

Much emphasis was on *knowledge* which had been denied to the common people and on rationalism.

In contrast to the comprehensive emancipatory goals of the Satyashodak Samaj, Gail Omvedt analyses the narrow aims of caste associations in Maharashtra at the same time. These did not question the caste system as such but only tried to gain advantages within the system.

The reason why the quest for radical social transformation of the Satyashodak Samaj did not succeed finally, lays in the weakness of the political aspects of organising and in the specific constellation of nationalist and leftist forces in the independence movement. A non-Brahman party was formed between 1917 and 1920. It was defined in its political content by a dialectical interaction between a very clearly elitist non-Brahman leadership of rural notables and urban professionals and merchants, and the more mass based Satyashodak forces which gave the party its ideological definition through which low class pressure was felt. "However, British institutions and general economic pressures aided only consolidation of elite power." (p. 205)

Non-Brahman power at the district level, increased influence in educational institutions, etc. -gave the non-Brahman elite a self-confidence which later enabled it to join the Indian National Congress. This move finally made the party obsolete and betrayed the mass interests of the non-Brahman movement. This betrayal of the mass interest became possible because the peasants had not captured power and consolidated it sufficiently to break up the class structure as such. The rural masses were powerful only in their cultural self-expression,

e.g. agitation by guerilla theater in which the traditional *tamashas* were given a new radical content.

On the other hand, the poor rural masses remained isolated in their struggle for economic power. A telling example was the Satara rebellion in which tenants rebelled against Brahman and Marwari (and occasionally non-Brahman) landlords for 2 years from 1919 on, being backed by the Satyashodak movement. The agitation as such was mainly for fair rent but was carried out also by cultural means like *tamashas* protest against Brahman rituals, breaking of idols and pollution of wells. While non-Brahman elite leaders backed the cultural content of the revolt, they ignored its economic thrust because of their own class interest. Similarly, nationalist leaders, being dominated by Brahmins and merchant castes, would back economic revolt against the Britishers but not against Indian landlords. Finally, even the Communists in Maharashtra who were fighting for economic revolution, were drawing their leadership from the ranks of militant Brahman nationalists who did not acknowledge the non-Brahman movement as peasant based and ignored its economic content. This specific incapacity of the communist party in Maharashtra to acknowledge the economic content of the non-Brahman movement and to recognize the importance of cultural issues in the process of mass-mobilisation was responsible for the failure to politically radicalize the non-Brahman movement. It was for this reason that the non-Brahman movement could be finally co-opted and absorbed by the socialist wing of the Indian National Congress which, under the leadership of Gandhi, made just sufficient social concessions in order to be acceptable to the more militant leaders of non-Brahmanism. There were individual non-Brahman leaders like Diakarao Javalkar who against all odds radicalized themselves and developed a Marxist position. But this was not representative of the movement.

It is important at this point to see the difference between Maharashtra on the one hand and Kerala and Andhra on the other. In Kerala and Andhra the Communists succeeded to build a base among non-Brahmans, to absorb cultural movements as e.g. the Ezhavas, and to take up the language issue. In Maharashtra and also in Tamil Nadu, the Communist party remained under Brahman dominance and left cultural issues to the non-Brahman movement. This split between cultural concerns on the one hand and economic demands on the other was responsible for the failure to achieve political radicalisation of peasant masses on a large scale in both these States. It is important to see that radical mass organisation became possible where cultural, economic and political radicalism were successfully united, while mass-organisation on a cultural thrust only (as in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu)

deprived the movement of its radical content. On the other hand, the importance of cultural issues drew mass support and left the Communists isolated where they ignored these issues. It is therefore obviously the integration of cultural, economic and political goals which safeguards the success of radical mass mobilisation.

## 2. The Conscientization Method of Paulo Freire<sup>2</sup>

The writings of Paulo Freire, especially his "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", are nowadays widely read all over the world and have attained recognition as a challenge to established approaches towards education, especially adult education. However, the main difficulty with Freire's books lies in the fact that they are written in a highly abstract style which makes it virtually impossible to trace the practical experiences from which this new pedagogy has grown. Besides, the method of alphabetisation which operates by breaking up certain key-words or "generative words" into their syllables and then composing new key words by introducing new vowel-combinations, is most easily applicable in the Latin languages but encounters several handicaps in many other languages. The Latin alphabet has the advantage to remain constant in whatever combinations vowels and consonants appear while in the Indian languages there is a tremendous variety of letter shapes depending on the combinations in which these letters occur. While it is not possible to unfold the whole conscientization method in just a few pages, it is important to briefly introduce some of Freire's leading ideas since they throw light on the question how cultural action and finally cultural revolution can be achieved. It is crucial to see in which context these thoughts developed.

Freire's is a voice of the awakening Third World. Coming from a poor peasant family himself, Freire began his educational experiences with illiterate peasants in the early sixties in North-East Brazil, one of the most miserable and exploited areas in Latin America. During this time, the country was passing through a profound crisis since the dominant elite was no longer able to contain the oppressed masses. The people were searching for new forms of social and political participation. The fatalism with which they had accepted the oppressive situation wore thin, traditional values crumbled, but new orientations were not yet emerging. In a

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2. For an introduction into Freire's method, see especially his "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", Penguin, 1972; "Cultural Action for Freedom", Penguin, 1972; and the file on "Conscientization", edited by the CCPD of the WCC.

way, despite vast economic and political differences, the situation can be compared to India where the urban and rural working class increasingly tries to assert its rights.

The immediate task in the Brazilian situation was to raise a critical consciousness in the people which would enable them to get a basic understanding of the structures of oppression and to find forms of self-expression which would help them to emerge from the "culture of silence" which had held them captive and to achieve an active involvement in shaping and transforming their own life and the whole of society. Freire's method was efficient enough to bring him into jail after the *coup d'état* of April 1964. Having been exiled after a few months, Freire gathered further experiences by applying his method in Chile. Only in the course of time his theoretical reflections, which nowadays have such wide currency, were developed. Since 1969 Freire is a special consultant of the WCC Office of Education. Nowadays he helps to restructure the educational system in the liberated Portuguese colony of Guinea-Bissau.

Freire points to the fact that an oppressive situation tends to submerge people and to dominate their minds to an extent where alternatives to oppression, liberating action, seem unthinkable. This leads to the acceptance of the oppressive situation and to identification with the oppressors themselves: the values of the society are the values of the dominant class. This explains why even in slums those people who somehow have managed to gain a slight economic advantage immediately tend to exploit their fellow-men, e.g., through money-lending. Even the denial of the oppressive situation does not necessarily bring about attitudes which are free from oppression. As long as the questioning of the system only takes the shape of mere propaganda and manipulation of the people by isolated leaders, the oppression of the people and the "culture of silence" prevail. This explains the phenomenon how people can be "used" by social or political leaders. Genuine conscientization therefore is not something which a few "conscious" and "aware" "educators" could bring about in the minds of people by "making" them "conscious" and "aware"; it is essentially a mutual process where there are no "teachers" and "taught", but where *all* learn together by teaching each other. While there are animators who take a certain initiative (but really such initiative is only possible at the request and in constant cooperation with the people), this kind of education cannot be done *for* people, it cannot even be "given" to them, it is done *with* them and *by* them. Freire opposes the traditional "banking education"<sup>3</sup> which is a one-way process aiming at "storing"

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3. See appendix p. 82.

of "knowledge", to *education in dialogue* based on inventing and re-inventing one's own reality in a process of action and reflection. While traditional education considers people to be "ignorant", conscientization starts by acknowledging the common sense and the practical knowledge of people as well as the capacity to take responsible action. In the words of Freire: "Trusting the people is the indispensable precondition for revolutionary change. A real humanist can be identified more by his *trust in the people*, which engages him in *their struggle* than by a thousand *actions in their favour without that trust*."<sup>4</sup>

Conscientization means problem-posing education which appeals to the individual to re-create his or her world. It is based on the insight that human beings are distinct from animals in as far as they not only "orient" themselves in their world, but really "make" this world. They can put themselves into a distance from their environment ("ad-mire" it), they give names to things, invent tools to act on nature and can think ahead by creating a mental image of the future as it should be and can be built. In this sense conscientization is "utopian"<sup>5</sup>: it anticipates something which is not yet but which can be brought about by action and reflection. In order to build this future, not only a vision is required but basic human capacities like love for people and a deep humility. Without these, any revolutionary movement is tempted to sacrifice people for the sake of abstract ideas.

Practically, the method of conscientization operates by discovering "generative themes", i.e., certain crucial situations and events which are pivotal in the life of the people. This could be landlessness, the housing situation, lack of water, money-lending, exploitative wages, etc. This "generative theme" is somehow "coded", i.e., it is depicted in a drawing, in a slide, by playing a sketch, in a song, etc. It is then "decoded" by the people themselves, who discover the situation. Of course, this process of becoming conscious implies the search for a strategy to tackle the situation and take action on it. While in the Latin American situation this method goes along with learning how to read and write by introducing "generative words" (i.e. words that are focal, in the mind of the people), it also works apart from a programme of direct alphabetization. Essentially, this process of "coding" and "decoding" a situation, "admiring" and "re-admiring" it—i.e., looking at it and then asking: Why is it that I look at it

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4. "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", p. 39. The italics are ours.

5. Utopia in Greek means something which has "no place".

*this way?*, serves to denounce and eject the myths and values of the oppressors and to give way to the building of new values and in the process, cultural action and cultural revolution. Apart from working on "generative themes" which are specific to different situations, it is also possible to introduce broader topics which initiate discussions about people in their relationships to culture, nature and history. Such discussions were introduced with ten slides depicting the human being as a creator of tools, language, culture and history.

The validity and limitations of Freire's method are indicated by the story of its success and failure. The success was such that it provoked a mass awakening among the illiterate peasants of north-east Brazil. However, after the coup, this awakening could be oppressed again by the government which used brutal violence and did not meet with any viable form of political organization which could have offered efficient resistance. The same is bound to happen wherever the State uses organised oppressive violence in order to push the people back into the culture of silence. Freire himself became increasingly aware that cultural action apart from political organisation is not viable. Cultural action has to lead into cultural revolution and cultural revolution can only succeed in the context of a socio-economic and political revolution. In this sense, it is a misunderstanding to take the Freire method only as a contribution to new approaches in education. It becomes fully relevant in the process of political mass organisation. It therefore has to be supplemented by a precise class analysis of the society in which the conscientization process and cultural action are supposed to take place. It also has to be combined with a precise understanding of the political forces which can bring about change in society.

### 3. Education through Organisation: Antonio Gramsci

Some of the deepest reflections on the transformation of culture, we owe to Antonio Gramsci, one of the founders of the Communist Party of Italy. Incarcerated under fascism, he developed his thoughts in the "Prison Notebooks". His thinking is nourished by years of experience in the workers' movement in Turin, an industrial town in northern Italy, while at the same time he was deeply concerned with the situation of the peasants in Southern Italy. He was born in Sardinia, a backward southern island exploited by the mainland and though his father belonged to the bureaucracy, the family was later impoverished. Restricted by poverty and ill-health, Gramsci had to struggle hard for his education. He settled down in Turin as a journalist, first under the influence of the idealist philosopher Benedetto Croce. He got involved in the socialist

party and saw his goal in educating the working class towards class consciousness. In the course of his involvement he understood that "education" is not enough. He radicalised himself politically and became one of the founding members of the Communist Party. He died after ten years of imprisonment in 1937.

In an early article written in 1916 on "Socialism and Culture", Gramsci made clear that culture had nothing to do with encyclopaedic knowledge, but that it has to do with self-knowledge and with understanding one's role in history. "Culture—is organisation, disciplining our own interior ego, it is taking possession of our own personality and winning a higher awareness through which we can succeed in understanding our own historical value, our own function in life, our own rights and our own duties".<sup>6</sup>

He saw as one of the goals of socialism to create a simple and human education, suitable to the popular classes and aware of their needs, desires, rights and duties. He understood that the emergence of a new class seeking to take power had to go together with freeing the mind from the values of the dominant classes: "The problem of education is the most important class problem."<sup>7</sup>

Soon Gramsci discovered that cultural propagandising from above was inadequate and that it was necessary to get involved in the workers' lives in order to understand their values and their motivations. In 1919/20, he plunged into organisational work with workers' councils in the factories of Turin. He understood that class-consciousness could not merely be created by education but that it is in changing the world practically that class-consciousness is created.

One of the decisive steps was to transform the workers' councils (commissioni interne) which had already been formed in the factories into real organs of proletarian power. The most advanced workers were organised under the slogans: "All power in the workshops to the workshop committees", and: "All state power to the workers' and peasants' Councils."<sup>8</sup> It is significant that the effort was made to link the urban working class with the peasantry. It was recognised

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6. Quoted after Alastair Davidson: "Antonio Gramsci: Towards an Intellectual Biography", Merlin Press, London, 1977, p. 75.

7. Ibid., p. 77.

8. Ibid., p. 116.

that a peasant society in transition towards industrialisation has strong conservative forces which can be used by a fascist leadership. It was, therefore, necessary not to rely exclusively on the urban proletariat but to awaken the peasantry politically. The movement led to mass occupation of factories in 1920 and in its radicalism got into conflict with the unions and the socialist party. Due to lack of leadership which would have given a uniting vision to the worker's movement, the worker's councils finally had to compromise with the entrepreneurs in September 1920. This failure led to a split in the Socialist Party and to the foundation of the Communist Party of Italy (PCI).

When fascism came into power during the twenties, Gramsci was one of the few leftists who identified it as the main enemy and started to fight it with all his energies. His analysis of fascism once again turned his interest to the peasantry. He strongly emphasized the party's organisational and educational task in the countryside. The fascist regime, identifying Gramsci as one of its worst enemies, put him on trial on charges of subversion and sentenced him to 20 years imprisonment with the objective to stop his mind from working. However, this could not be achieved since Gramsci worked ceaselessly on many theoretical problems in his prison notebooks. In this way he remained influential for many decades after his death.

For our own purpose of understanding the tasks of cultural revolution it is sufficient to confine ourselves to his writings on the role of the intellectuals, education, philosophy and popular culture.<sup>9</sup>

Gramsci maintains that there is no social group independent of class which could be categorized as "the intellectuals."<sup>10</sup> Potentially, all human beings are intellectuals because they all have an intellect and are using it in one way or other. But not all human beings are intellectuals by their social function. Gramsci distinguishes two categories of intellectuals: the "traditional" professional intellectuals and the "organic" intellectuals. In India, e.g., the Brahmins can be categorized as "traditional" intellectuals par excellence who also succeed to dominate the modern educational system and largely even the intellectual leadership of the communist parties. The

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9. "Antonio Gramsci: Selections from Prison Notebooks", ed. and transl. by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, International Publishers, New York, 1971.

10. Ibid., pp. 3-23.

"organic" intellectuals on the other hand are the thinking and organising element of a fundamental social class which struggles for self-realisation. They are not intellectuals by profession since they may have any job characteristic of their class but they direct the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong. In India, such "organic" intellectuals would belong to the urban and rural working class and in terms of caste to the middle and backward castes as well as Harijans and Girijans. It is the task of the party to channelise the activities of these "organic" intellectuals and to link them up with progressive forces among the "traditional" intellectuals in order to broaden the perspective of the emerging class to overcome narrow economism and to develop a vision of a new society which helps the class to achieve hegemony. The function of the party is "directive and organisational, i.e., educative, i.e. intellectual."<sup>11</sup> The task of education and of cultural transformation is thus an integral part of the process of class-organisation. The problem is therefore not only one of new concepts of education. The problem is "not one of model curricula but of men, and not just of the men who are actually teachers themselves but of the entire social complex which they express."<sup>12</sup> This means the new teachers have either to come from the working class itself or they have to merge with the working class sufficiently to be able to express its aspirations. Gramsci also characterises everyone as a philosopher. This philosophy expresses itself at three levels: 1) language which expresses concepts and a whole world-view 2) "common sense", i.e., generally held assumptions, and 3) popular religion including beliefs, superstitions, attitudes, "folklore."<sup>13</sup> Since everyone is a philosopher anyway, it is also possible to create an awareness of the prevailing philosophy and to transform it critically. This critical awareness cannot be restricted to an elitist intellectual group. It has to penetrate the "common sense" scientifically and give it a historical perspective. It is, therefore, necessary to study the language of the people, their "common sense" and their popular religion in order to grasp the values and motivation of the masses. But even study will not be enough as long as it remains at a level of detached contemplation and excludes emotional involvement.

Gramsci points out an integral relationship between Feeling, Understanding and Knowing: "The popular element 'feels' but does not always know or understand; the intellectual

11. Ibid., p. 16.

12. Ibid., p. 25.

13. Ibid., pp. 323 ff.

element 'knows' but does not always understand and in particular does not always feel.— The intellectual's error consists in believing that one can know without understanding and even more without feeling and being impassioned (not only for knowledge itself but also for the object of knowledge): in other words, that the intellectual can be an intellectual (and not a pure pedant) if distinct and separate from the people-nation, that is, without feeling the elementary passions of the people, understanding them and therefore explaining and justifying them in the particular historical situation and connecting them dialectically to the laws of history and to a superior conception of the world, scientifically and coherently elaborated-i.e. knowledge. One cannot make politics-history without this passion, without this sentimental connection between intellectuals and people-nation "<sup>14</sup>" Summarising, we can say that Gramsci sees cultural transformation as the unity between emotional identification with the masses and intellectual effort to develop a revolutionary theory. This unity is achieved in the praxis of people's organisation in the class struggle.

#### 4. A Global Vision: Roger Garaudy

We have seen in the preceding pages that the need for cultural revolution arises in "developing" societies all over the world, especially during the transition from semi-feudal relations of production to capitalism, but also in immature capitalism itself or in transition to socialism (as e.g. in China). However, it is important to be aware of the fact that the need for cultural revolution nowadays arises also in so-called "developed" societies in the capitalist West as well as in Eastern Europe. The reason lies in the fact that these "developed" societies have been oriented towards unlimited growth, while it has become clear that the resources in the world are *limited* and that the present generation has a *responsibility for future generations*. The so-called "limits to growth" debate has been largely ignored or rejected in the countries of the Third World because any concept of zero growth is at present not feasible in a poor country with high population growth and because it was rightly feared that the rich nations would use their power to freeze the present condition of maldistribution of goods and resources and try to prevent the poor nations from improving their condition. Yet, the idea of 'qualified growth' as developed by critical economists in countries like India (i.e. growth in essentials while cutting down on luxuries and struggle for just distribution) is

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14. Ibid, p. 418.

much closer to the limits to growth concept than it may appear at the first sight. The common factor is that planning has to consider the basic needs of all and has to be responsible for coming generations. In both cases, "wild growth" is rejected and people's participation is necessary in order to spell out the basic needs and to control the distribution. Since socialism in Eastern Europe developed in competition with Western capitalism, it too has internalised the "wild growth" idea to a considerable extent. Besides, it suffers from a hangover of 19th century belief in "progress", "evolution", and the goodness of science, while it has now become clear that not every next step which is technically possible is necessarily beneficial to human kind, that technocracy violates human needs and that responsible collective decisions have to be taken about the kind of future which is desirable. While we have scientific methods to analyse society and to determine by which means certain goals can be achieved, science as such does not lead us to automatic conclusions about our goals. Different options are possible and responsible choices have to be made.

These insights require a reconstruction of society in the process of which new forms of people's participation are tried out and the task of people's organisation which we experience as vital in the different local situations in India, has become a worldwide task which has to be tackled according to different national and local conditions. Since this comprehensive reconstruction not only requires decentralised control of production and new forms of political representation but also a new understanding of history and of the future, it requires a cultural revolution of unprecedented dimensions.

One of the authors who have inspired worldwide thinking along these lines is Roger Garaudy, a French university professor of working class background, who was expelled from the Central Committee of the French Communist Party for his fundamental critique of East European socialism, in the late sixties,—in fact for expressing views which are nowadays widely shared by the Euro-Communists. His books "The Alternative Future"<sup>15</sup> and "The Turning Point of Socialism"<sup>16</sup> have been widely read. Since these books are quite well known and easily available in India, we will confine ourselves to more recent and less accessible publications: "The Project

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15. Penguin Books, 1976.

16. Fontana Books, London, 1970.

Hope"<sup>17</sup> and "Reflections of a Man".<sup>18</sup> While the former mainly projects the perspectives of a liveable future, the latter gives the author's views on basic questions of life in a more personal way.

Garaudy starts off by showing how the concept of wild growth is at the root of the worldwide energy crisis which culminates in the race for nuclear energy. If this race is maintained, 60% of all the world revenue will have to be devoted to creation of nuclear energy at the expense of all other human needs. Besides, the problem of how to transport plutonium and how to handle nuclear waste is by no means solved. An accident can cause innumerable deaths and have murderous after-effects for as much as 10,000 years. Parallel to the race for nuclear energy goes the arms race. Production is not for the satisfaction of basic needs but for the isolation and stimulation of artificially created needs. At the same time the satisfaction of basic needs becomes more and more difficult. In 25 years the world population will have doubled. This means that within the next 25 years humanity has to accomplish as much as it had so far accomplished throughout its entire history.

Garaudy traces the origins of the concept of wild growth to the market economy which in the form of competition has created the war of all against all. It is a mechanism of exclusion and inequalities based on purchasing power. It generates crisis because no comprehensive view regulates the relation between production and real needs. It gave origin to the parliament and its parties which function by the same mechanism of competition and exclusion. Even individual careers are based on competition and not on basic needs.

In the East European socialist societies the attempt has been made to control the market from above. But the outcome has largely been State capitalism. Centralised and authoritarian planning excluded mass participation. Adjustments have been made in competition with Western capitalism and no radical alternatives to the capitalist market have been found.

Garaudy projects a system of self-management of production and consumption which is inspired by the take-over of enterprises by the workers themselves as frequently happened in France in recent years. Of course such a system of self-management cannot mean total decentralisation since only fragmentation and again competition would be the result.

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17. "Le Project Esperance", Paris, 1976.

18. "Parole d'Homme", Editions Robert Laffont, Paris, 1975.

But central decisions must be taken by genuine delegates of the people who are again responsible to and controlled by the people.

People involved in self-managed production have to ask themselves the following questions:

1. What are we going to do together, what is our economic project? *Self-determination of the aim.*
2. How are we going to structure our enterprise and organise our work? *Self-management of means.*
3. Who is going to direct and coordinate our efforts? *Delegation of power.*
4. How are we going to share the results of our common efforts, salaries, investment—taxes? *Sharing of fruits.*

Production must evolve out of a pluralism of projects suggested from below. Delegation of power must rotate in order to prevent the crystallisation of a ruling class. Information of all the workers and citizens is crucial. Methods must be found to value work other than through market criteria and to evaluate social needs other than through the demand of the market.

Parallel to the socialisation of economic production political power and the functions of the State must also come under popular control. Garaudy discusses party politics and territorial representation. He suggests representation which is essentially a congress of councils of manual and intellectual workers. In the delegation of power, the principle of rotation must be rigorously applied.

Along with this new economic and political system cultural and educational projects must be defined, the goals of society be publicly discussed and general norms of public order be defined in order to avoid bureaucracy and professionalism. Since all this requires a comprehensive cultural revolution, the scrutinizing of the prevailing cultural values is necessary.

Cultural reorientation will imply that non-Western cultures have as much place in education in the West as Western cultures. Arts and reflections on the creative arts have as much place as sciences and techniques.<sup>19</sup> Prospection, i.e.

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19. Garaudy's most recent book: "For a Dialogue of Civilizations", focuses entirely on this point. "Pour un dialogue des civilisations", Editions Denoel, Paris 1977.

reflection on the goals, values and meaning of the future needs as much place as history. It is necessary to "defatalize" history, i.e., not to see it as a line or determinist movement but as something which emanated from a plurality of possibilities. In the same way, the future can be looked at as something for which the right options have to be chosen. A liveable future becomes possible because transcendence to go beyond oneself and beyond what has been, is a basic human possibility not just a religious category.

Garaudy is not very concrete in spelling out how the existing political systems can be overcome. He mentions a variety of developments which could bring about a rupture of the old system. Even elections could work as a detonator or an insurrection. It could also be a global strike of the "historic block" (i.e., a block of all the rising forces for change) as it occurred in France in 1968 but did not succeed due to lack of preparation of the masses. The elaboration of a counter-project of society is crucial. Grass-roots organisations, establishment of workers' councils, etc., are obviously essential. Since Garaudy discards political parties altogether, he does not spell out what could substitute the role of a revolutionary party, if there is any substitute. Since so far no revolution has ever taken place without a revolutionary party, this point needs special attention.

Garaudy's most important contribution is probably his capacity to hope and to encourage others to try the impossible. We can summarise this contribution with a quotation from a passage on the meaning of life:

"Faith is the decision to *live* with the certainty that *whatever is, is not all*. Without this certainty we would not have any freedom since we would be immersed in a finished, accomplished reality, which we would not be able to make fertile, to transform, to transcend.

Hope is the militant decision to live with this certainty that *we have not explored all possibilities if we have not tried the impossible*, i.e., that which is neither the extension nor the result of the past or the present, of that which has existed or exists.

Love is the creative decision to *have faith in the other as being capable of the impossible*. Love is the love, in everyone, of the risen one who inhabits each person and carries him beyond his frontiers. As faith is faith in the resurrection. And hope, hope for the resurrection."<sup>20</sup>

20. "Parole d'Honneur", pp. 70-1. This is our own translation. The italics are of Garaudy.

## Suggestions for Cultural Analyses and Cultural Action

Instead of ready-made "conclusions" on how culture and religion operate in the development process, we would like to encourage our readers to reflect on their local situation. Of course, the questions we can raise here are by no means exhaustive. They are just meant to be an encouragement for inquiry and have to be reframed and adjusted according to local situations. They are meant for people who work in people's organisations. We assume that such people are part of a group or a movement.

1. Try to analyse the *language of the people*. Differences between castes/classes in their self-expression. Do people use different forms of address for "high" and "low", male and female? What does this mean for their ideas about equality? Try to collect proverbs on caste, women, religion, attitude towards life, perspective of future, etc. Analyse their content. Does the content interfere with people's organisation? Is it possible to coin new proverbs? Is your own language different from the language of the people? How and why?
2. Try to analyse the *caste structure* in your place. Is there any dominant caste? Which are the oppressed castes? Do the oppressed castes practice caste-discrimination among themselves? How do they discriminate and what reasons do they give? How are caste differences expressed (rights, duties, attitudes, dress, etc.)? How do people feel about caste?
3. Are *political parties* linked up with certain castes? Are there special caste constituencies in election? Do reserved seats play a role? Is your own group confined to certain caste limits in its work? If yes, do you think it is an advantage or disadvantage?
4. Does common struggle among the oppressed sections help to establish daily social contacts among different castes? Try to pinpoint overlapping and differences between *caste and class*.
5. Try to analyse the *status of women* in your place. Is the status of women different in different castes? Analyse the customs about arranging marriages, giving dowry, etc. How much is it "tradition" and how much is it capitalist "business"? Analyse the role of women of different age and status in the joint family. Try to specify. Are there women working outside the house? What are their wages as compared to men? Is there any shared responsibility for household work and the care of children in those cases?

where women work outside the house? Is it possible to organise women in your place? Why/Why not? Are there any female social workers in your group? If not, why? If yes, are they accepted by the village community? Are they accepted in your own group? What are the difficulties of acceptance for female social workers in the village (in the group)?

6. Try to find out how people feel about "*village community*". Are there any activities in which the "*village community*" as a whole participates (e.g. festivals, building a school, etc.) If there are such activities, who takes the lead, who makes decisions, who benefits, what is the scope for people's participation? If people do not believe in "*village community*", why is it? In which other community do they believe? Do you find communalism among certain religious groups or castes? What are their criteria for "*community*"? What is the difference between "*community*" and "*solidarity*"?

7. Try to find out about the *religion of the people*; which rituals do they perform regularly and why? Which are their favourite festivals? Analyse the content of the festivals. How much money do people spend on them? What are the myths/stories they tell around festivals, the songs they sing, the dances they dance? Try to pinpoint the differences in faith of different castes and classes. Try to relate the religious faith of the people to topics of social justice, equality, struggle for human rights, etc.

8. Try to analyse the *structure of your own group*. What is the leadership pattern? How are decisions made? Are the village people able to relate to you at a level of equality? Is there any hierarchy of responsibility in your group or do you have rotation of responsibility. What is the role of women in your own group? Do you use any symbols, songs, plays, posters to project the goals of your group. Does caste play a role in your group? Does religion play a role? If so, do you find it positive or negative. Do you confine yourself to local work only or do you have wider contacts? Is your local work related to any broader vision of transformation of society?

9. Try to summarize your analysis by spelling out the *dominant values* in the society around you, the morality, the attitudes towards other people, towards private property, division of labour, equality, the goals for which people live. Try to confront this with the values, goals and lifestyles of the "*new society*" of which you think.

## APPENDICES

### I. Banking Knowledge\*

- " 1. The teacher teaches and the students are taught.
- 2. The teacher knows everything and the students know nothing.
- 3. The teacher thinks and the students are thought about.
- 4. The teacher talks and the students listen-meekly.
- 5. The teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined.
- 6. The teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply.
- 7. The teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher.
- 8. The teacher chooses the programme content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it.
- 9. The teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his own professional authority, which he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students.
- 10. The teacher is the subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects."

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\* Paulo Freire, "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", pp. 46-7.

## II. Questions of a Woman Agricultural Labourer\*

326, V Main, 1<sup>st</sup> floor  
Koramangala  
Pune-411004  
India

*Chorus :*

All our life is on fire, all the prices rising,  
Give us an answer, O rulers of the country!

A handful of American wheat, a kilo of milo mixed  
with chaff,  
Doesn't our country grow crops,  
Or do we have only mud-mixed grain?  
Give us an answer....

We have forgotten the colour of milk,  
Coconuts and dried fruits have gone underground,  
Our children have only jaggery tea for nourishment.  
Give us an answer....

Sweet oil for cooking is the price of gold,  
Coconut oil for our hair is not to be found,  
Without rock oil for lamps we have grown familiar  
with darkness.

We burn in the summer, we are drenched in the  
rains,  
We bear the rigour of winter without any clothes,  
Why don't we have any shelter ?  
Give us an answer....

We toil day and night and sleep half-starved  
While the parasites fill their bellies with butter,  
Why does the thief get nourishment while the  
owner is cheated ?

There are pastures for the cattle of the rich,  
For forest development land is preserved,  
Why is there no land to support living men ?  
Give us an answer....

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\* Baskar Jadhav, "Bulletin of concerned Asian Scholars", Special Issue: Asian Women Vol. 7 No. 1, Jan - March, 1975, p. 62, transl. by Gail Omvedt.

Tall buildings rise before our eyes,  
The roads cannot contain these motorcycles and  
cars,  
On whose labour has such development been built ?  
Give us an answer....

We filled the jails for independence,  
We hurled bombs into the cars of the white men,  
Did we do it to fatten the sacred cow ?  
Give us an answer....

When we ask for a rise in wages, or work for the  
unemployed, .  
When we demand land for cultivation,  
Why are we met with jail, beatings and bullets ?  
Give us an answer....

Now you have taken a new disguise  
And appear in the colours of socialism,  
But we no longer want for today the promises of  
tomorrow! Give us an answer....

Now we will stand on our own feet,  
We will throw caste and religious differences to  
the winds,  
We call for the brotherhood and sisterhood of all  
toilers!

We vow today to fight with our lives,  
We will bury capitalism in the grave  
And sound the drums of our state!

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